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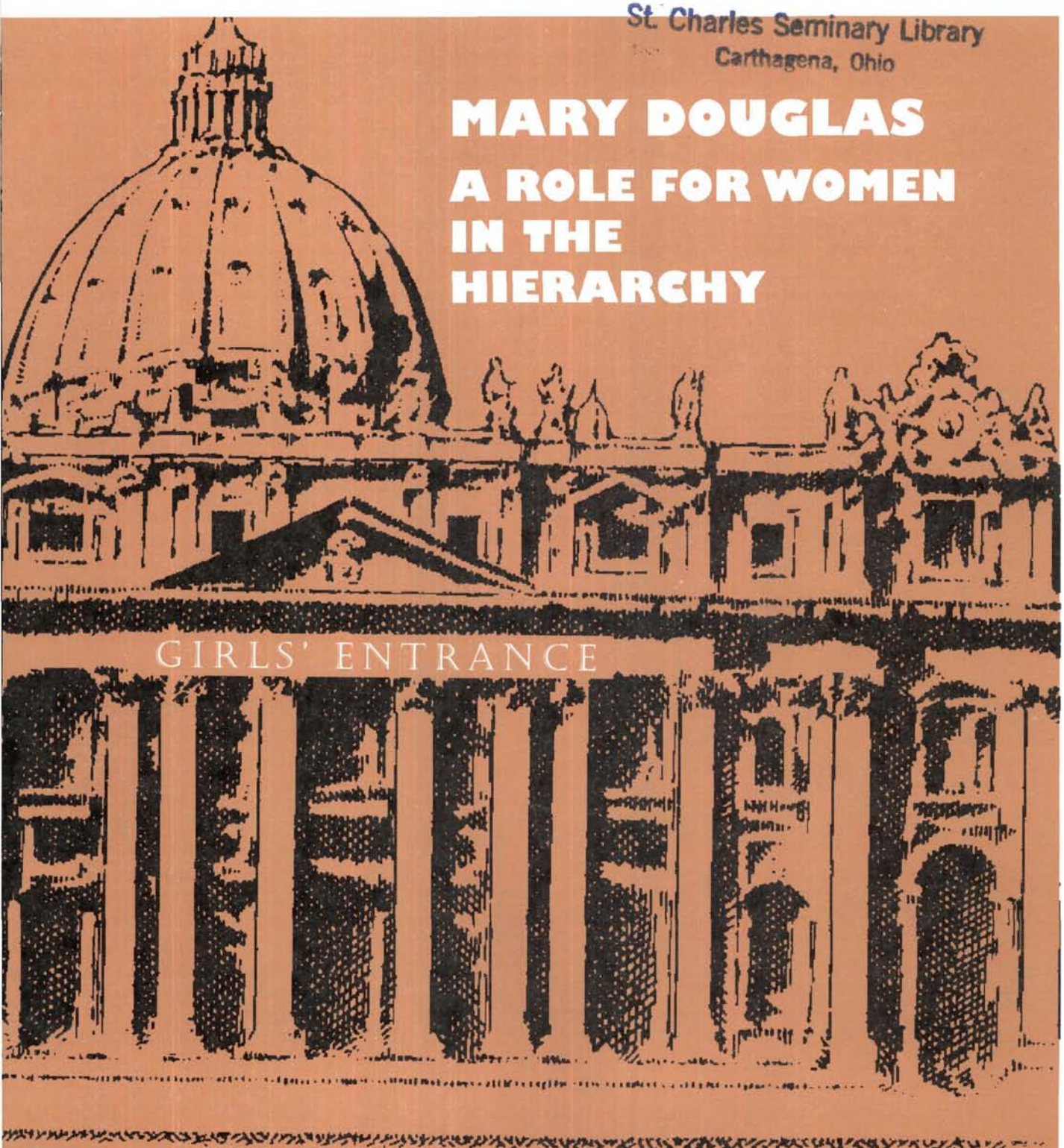
A ROLE FOR WOMEN IN THE HIERARCHY



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To the Editors

The veto was right

As practicing Catholics, my husband and I are deeply dismayed at the misrepresentations that appeared in *Commonweal* regarding the president's veto of H.R. 1833, a bill that would have banned certain types of late-term abortions [editorials, April 19 and May 3]. This legislation was wrong, and its authors have misled its supporters with the non-medical term "partial birth" and with talk of "scissors" and "sucking brains," language that does not appear in the bill.

I was one of those "weeping women" *Commonweal* speaks of so dismissively. Though I am a registered Republican, my husband and I volunteered to be with President Clinton as he vetoed this bill. We were there out of love for our son, out of gratitude to the president, and out of a desire to protect other families like ours that will face similar tragedies. I thank God that President Clinton was brave enough to look past the rhetoric and recognize the real issue, women's health.

Mr. Clinton sat with us, listened to us, and treated us with tremendous compassion. He grieved over our losses as deeply as anyone not part of our families ever has. It took courage to veto this bill, and President Clinton did it not because he "chose to toe the line drawn by the abortion lobby," as one commentator has charged, but because he knew the truth when he heard it, from the real people who have lived it.

Last April we learned that I was pregnant with our first child, and we were thrilled. Nineteen weeks into my pregnancy, an ultrasound indicated that our baby's head was too large and contained excessive fluid—a condition called hydrocephalus. We never thought about abortion. This was our son. We believed that God wouldn't give us a problem if we couldn't handle it.

We waited several weeks and consulted five specialists. Every one of them told us the same thing. It was a very advanced, textbook case of hydrocephalus and our baby would be stillborn. They told us there was no hope and recommended we terminate the pregnancy. Some cases of hydrocephalus are treatable and that is what we prayed for. But we were not to be one of those lucky families. The hydrocephalus progressed very quickly; our precious baby was dying. This was God's will.

The medical procedure which helped us, intact dilation and evacuation (IDE), would have been banned by this legislation. The procedure is grossly misrepresented by the press, our elected officials, and the National Conference of Catholic Bishops. No scissors were used and no one sucked out our baby's brain. My cervix was dilated twice a day for three days. I was under general anesthesia during all parts of the procedure. On the fourth day, our son was extracted, a simple needle was used to remove excess fluid from his head—the same fluid that was killing him—to allow his head to pass undamaged through the birth canal.

Not only was our son dying, but the complications of the pregnancy put my health in danger. He could not swallow and thus was not absorbing amniotic fluid. This problem, called polyhydramnios, would have continued to worsen and could have caused my uterus to rupture. If my baby died *in utero*, the resulting toxins could cause a hemorrhage and possibly require a hysterectomy. The hydrocephaly also made natural labor impossible, as our son's head at twenty-two weeks was already larger than that of a full-term baby.

The other medical procedure available to me was a hysterotomy. This is similar to a Caesarean, but is much more invasive and can adversely affect a woman's future fertility. The uterus is cut in half lengthwise, creating massive scar tissue. This scar tissue makes it hard, sometimes impossible, for the placenta to attach to the uterine wall, and often the placenta will push through the scar, causing the uterus to rupture.

With no hope for our baby, my doctors recommended an IDE as the best procedure to protect my health. Every

(Continued on page 4)

THE PARTIAL-BIRTH ABORTION BAN ACT (HR 1833)
AS PASSED BY THE UNITED STATES SENATE ON DECEMBER 7, 1995

Sec. 1531. Partial-birth abortions prohibited.

(a) Any physician who, in or affecting interstate or foreign commerce, knowingly performs a partial-birth abortion and thereby kills a human fetus shall be fined under this title or imprisoned not more than two years, or both. This paragraph shall not apply to a partial-birth abortion that is necessary to save the life of a mother whose life is endangered by a physical disorder, illness, or injury: Provided, that no other medical procedure would suffice for that purpose. This paragraph shall become effective one day after enactment.

(b) (1) As used in this section, the term "partial-birth abortion" means an abortion in which the person performing the abortion partially vaginally delivers a living fetus before killing the fetus and completing the delivery....

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COMMONWEAL

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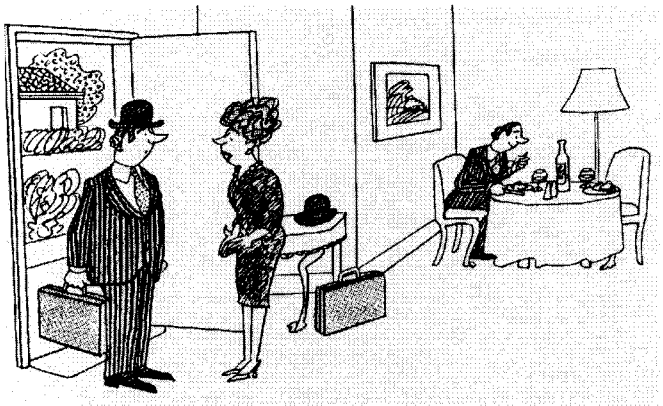

"But darling, your office faxed you home an hour ago!"

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medical expert told us it was safe and compassionate for both me and our Danny. I could have "let nature take its course," as some have suggested, but I wouldn't do that for any serious medical condition. I respect and trust my doctors and followed their advice. Only doctors—people who have dedicated their lives to helping others—are qualified to determine which medical procedures should be used and in which circumstances.

Late-term abortions have nothing to do with choice. We did not "choose" an abortion, our baby was dying. I believe God led me to the best medical procedure for me and for our son. This procedure allowed me to become pregnant again—we are expecting another baby in September. This child might never have been possible if I had been forced by a cruel, ill-advised law to have a surgical procedure less appropriate and safe for my circumstances. We lost our first child before we even had him; this legislation would have mandated that we risk losing all hope of ever having children.

We must leave medical decisions to families and experts in the medical community. It is not the place of government, the media, or our churches.

MARY-DOROTHY LINE
Los Angeles, Calif.

The editors reply:

Mary-Dorothy Line's experience is a tragic one. We sympathize—as who would not—with the loss to her and her husband of their first child.

It is always useful to have our editorial judgments challenged by a correspondent speaking from experience. By way of response, however, it is necessary to note at the outset that the issue at hand is not solely medical and that it is not only a private matter to be agreed upon by patient and doctor; it calls for political and moral decision making as well as medical expertise.

Commonweal's two editorials were directed not at Mrs. Line or the other women present for the veto in President Clinton's office, but rather at the veto itself (our first editorial, April 19) and at the president's chosen means of dramatizing his veto (our second editorial, May 3).

A majority of Congress voted to ban the partial-birth abortion procedure (also called intact dilation and extraction), not because all members of that majority are opposed to abortion, but because the appearance of infanticide made manifest by this procedure forced our lawmakers to look at the reality and meaning of late-term abortions. For the first time since *Roe* v. *Wade* legalized abortion in 1973, a legislative body took seriously *Roe*'s stricture that late-term abortions could be subject to legal restrictions, and that beyond the point of viability the interests of the mother had to be balanced with those of the fetus.

The emotional tenor of the veto ceremony served to obscure the purpose of the proposed new law and, more important, to exempt Mr. Clinton from offering a principled defense of his veto—an exemption he continues to employ. In a cross-country debate with Senator Robert Dole on May 23, Mr. Clinton characterized alternatives to intact dilation and extraction in misleading terms: "They rip your body to shreds and you could never have another baby, even though the baby you were carrying couldn't live."

While Mrs. Line may agree with Mr. Clinton's statement, she thinks political debate about late-term abortions is inappropriate and beside the point. She argues that she had no choice, either in the treatment of her son or in abortion procedures. If an IDE had been legally unavailable to her doctors, she believes her health, her capacity to have another child, and perhaps her life might have been seriously threatened (the law, it should be noted, allows the procedure to save the life of a mother). Mrs. Line relies firmly on her doctors' advice and argues on behalf of other women in her circumstances that these decisions should be left in the hands of doctors.

In fact, other medical advice would have suggested a different course. Standard obstetrical care in the case of hydrocephalus is and has been to wait until the onset of labor and at that point drain fluid from the head while the fetus is still within the uterus to allow vaginal delivery. Sometimes the fetus dies, but the death is not directly intended. Caesarean sections [hysterotomies], another method of delivery, are routinely—perhaps too routinely—performed on thousands of women every year. There is no evidence that they impair future pregnancies, or threaten the mother's health. Nor, according to our inquiries, is polyhydramnios a condition that would likely cause the uterus to rupture.

While Mrs. Line's trust in her doctors' medical advice is understandable, her confidence in their moral advice seems misplaced. Or perhaps she failed to realize that she was receiving moral as well as medical advice. In a medical culture increasingly predicated on a utilitarian calculus (why waste the time or resources?), doctors under its sway offer their pregnant patients more than medical advice; they give them moral permission to dismiss the infant's claims to care, comfort, and compassion. Congressional hearings on the partial-birth abortion ban indicate that the majority of such procedures are elective, and not representative of the situations described by Mrs. Line.

In all this, we believe, doctors have no greater authority than the media, and considerably less authority than properly belongs to public servants elected to make our laws, and to those who are responsible for passing on our moral tradition: ethicists, theologians, religious bodies, and, yes, even

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Summery judgments

So much to judge, so little time, too little space. Before it's too late, we offer the following brief appraisals of some of the great moral, political, and social issues of the day—well, actually of the past year—that have so far escaped our editorial judgment and opining. Here we go:

Brother turns in brother as Unabomber suspect: Good. The ingredients for a Greek tragedy.

Auction of Jeffrey Dahmer's possessions: Bad, even obscene.

Auction of Jeffrey Dahmer's possessions canceled: Good, but done for the wrong reasons.

Commander-in-chief William Jefferson Clinton says he's on active military duty and, therefore, need not respond to Paula Jones's lawsuit: Limp.

Tupperware's fiftieth anniversary: Durable.

Commonweal wins three first-place awards from the Catholic Press Association for best editorial, best review section, and best article: Excellent. Excellent. And Excellent.

Elliott Abrams, who pleaded guilty to withholding evidence from Congress in the Iran-*Contra* Affair, named to succeed George Weigel as president of the Ethics and Public Policy Center: Counter-intuitive, to say the least.

A draft report from Deputy Secretary of State Strobe Talbot in January on the future of Russia failed to mention that the Communists might win the June 16 elections. A colleague caught the omission: Red in the face?

Chernobyl's Unit 4 is still cooking ten years after the meltdown and its containment shed is deteriorating: Not too soon to think about nuclear waste disposal.

The Federal Aviation Administration revokes the pilot's license of a Cuban exile who dropped political leaflets over Havana in July 1995 and who regularly overflies Cuban territorial waters. A February 1996 flight led to the shooting down of two planes, the death of their crews, and a war of words between Cuba and the United States: What took so long?

Jack Miles wins Pulitzer prize for *God: A Biography*: Congratulations to Jack. Also to us. A prepublication excerpt appeared here March 10,1995.

Minimum wage increase: Good. (When does it take effect at *Commonweal*?)

At least for the moment, Newt Gingrich more or less disappears: Fine.

Prosecutor secretly tapes suspect's confession to a priest in Oregon jail: Prosecutor ought to get down on his knees and confess.

Danger of widespread famine in North Korea: Send food.

Benjamin Netanyahu elected Israeli prime minister: Hold your breath.

Shimon Peres loses election for Israeli prime minister: A lot worse than a surprise.

Iraq agrees to conditions allowing humanitarian aid: Good.

Bob Dole quits Senate, sheds suit, tries for casual: Still stiff.

General Khin Nyunt of Myanmar denounces the United States for "attempting to bring Myanmar under its influence through the pretext of democracy and human rights": Another victory for Western imperialism.

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Bill Clinton's lead in the election polls: Remember when Michael Dukakis was seventeen points ahead of George Bush?

By 2015 Bombay will have a population of 27 million, Mexico City 18.7 million, and Cairo 14.5 million: What, us worry?

Clintons' Whitewater partners convicted of fraud: *See*, Commander-in-chief above.

Whitewater verdict and Clinton reelection prospects: Between Little Rock and a hard place.

Bosnia war crimes trial opens at the Hague: Good.

Bosnian Serbs, Radovan Karadzic and Ratko Mladic, indicted for war crimes, continue to rule the Serbs in Bosnia under the "can't find, can't arrest" policy of NATO: Find them, arrest them, and send them to the Hague.

Ross Perot: Will someone find the fly swatter.

Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan will vote to override Clinton's veto of partial-birth abortion ban: Good.

President Clinton on the renewal of most-favored-nation status for China: "We cannot walk backward into the future": Maybe not, but why walk blindfolded?

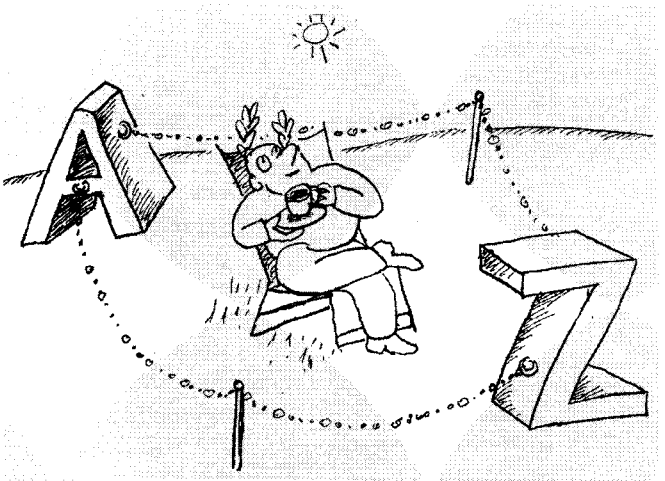
Tridentine Mass celebrated in New York's Saint Patrick's Cathedral: Mostly *malum*, but great outfits.

Vatican issues list of forty-five recommended movies: Kiss of death?

Major manufacturers announce that they will gradually eliminate grocery coupons: Is nothing sacred?

Dwight Gooden's no-hitter in Yankee Stadium on May 14: A triumph for those taking life one inning at a time.

Commonweal begins its summer publishing schedule: Much needed by all.



In keeping with *Commonweal*'s usual schedule, only one issue is published each month during July and August. The next issue will be dated July 12.

OF SEVERAL MINDS

LIZ McCLOSKEY

FEMINIST HOMEMAKER CONFESSES

Taking the irony out of housework

It was one of the first days of a most welcome spring when my planned afternoon run turned into a long, ambling walk with my four-year-old son. Brian stopped so often to admire the flowers (especially the dandelions) that he could have been a poster child for wonderment. I actually said to myself, "Take time to smell the roses," and this with only the barest trace of sarcasm.

I have started thinking in clichés. I am not troubled by it. What makes that noteworthy is that I am of the ironic generation. I'm at the tail end of the baby boomers who entered adulthood chuckling at the irony of doing so. The signs of middle-class adulthood—marriage, children, mortgages, pension plans, lawnmowers—had already been deconstructed when I hit graduate school in the mideighties. At least in my circles, any genuine aspiration for the "trappings" was met with inevitable gibing, even scorn. Such phrases as "grown-up," "the house in the suburbs," "happy homemaker" automatically grew quotation marks that challenged their authenticity. In a climate of viewing entire lives as clichés, it is only natural that certain common expressions ("take time...") and the wisdom underlying them, should suffer the same fate.

And now my confession. I am a grown-up. I live in the suburbs. I am a homemaker. I am happy. No quote marks. The reality of this began to become clear to me when I saw an excerpt from a 1950s high-school home economics textbook that had been circulated, as a joke, around the corporate headquarters of a major company, giving tips about how to greet your husband when he arrives home. As a feminist, I was prepared to read it and laugh (or scream)—but found that many of its recommendations were already parts of my daily routine. "Have dinner ready" (well, at least I see it as a worthy goal); "Prepare yourself"; "Clear away the clutter"; "Prepare the children"; "Be happy to see him"; "Listen to him—you may have a dozen things to tell him but the moment of his arrival is not the time." "The goal: Try to make your home a place of peace and order where your husband can relax in body and spirit."

Of course I would edit some of the tips. I would also apply the same advice to a husband coming home from work: "Prepare yourself before walking in the door"; "Get dinner on the table"; "Clear away the clutter in your mind"; "Be happy to see her"; "Listen to her...," etc. And I would amend the overall goal to include wife and husband as homemaking partners in creating a place of peace and order where the whole family can relax in body and spirit. But overall, that 1950s coun-

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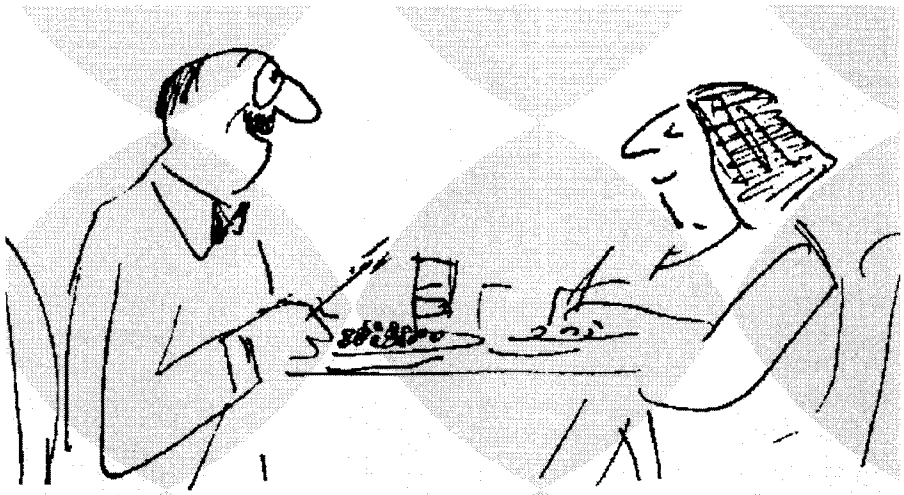
sel was not hilariously off the mark in describing my actual day-to-day living, or at least my daily aspirations.

If someone had predicted ten years ago that one day I would stand in the doorway every morning, joining the syrupy hands of two little boys in a daily good-by wave to my husband, I would have resented it. Now I am almost to the point of not being embarrassed by it. A friend distinctly recalls telling her mother that she never wanted to have a conversation about the price of cabbage. This same friend, speaking only on the condition of anonymity, found herself sitting in her backyard a few weeks ago knitting with her mother as they watched the children play.



"Nobody makes peas like you do, dear."

Our moderate discomfiture and our gradual acceptance of the cliché-like nature of our days are phenomena that have not been fully processed by the feminist movement. When I posted a question on the Internet: "Is it possible to be a feminist homemaker?" the overwhelming response from women working outside the home was "Of course!" because the choice is our own. But what is not talked about is that the daily life and sacrifices of a homemaker, even a feminist one, resemble the picture of domesticity that feminists have tried so hard to cross out.

Certainly there are differences. A feminist homemaker stays home because she wants to be with her children, not because she believes it to be her designated place. She may have a part-time job; she may stay up until 1 A.M. on a work project; she may plan to resume her career when her kids are in school. The husband of a feminist homemaker may make the evening's meal before he leaves for work in the morning; he may be a full partner in the household chores of laundry, cleaning, and shopping; he may put the kids to bed at night. But there is no getting around the realities of this scenario. The woman is economically dependent on her husband; her career is secondary to her family; she sacrifices herself for her children; and she stands at the kitchen sink a good part of her day. And ironically, it does not feel so funny after all.

Putting the received wisdom of well-worn adages in quotes did a lot of good. It shook up our assumptions and presumptions. It forced us to look inside the quotes and see what was really there. Much of what was there was oppressive. But, hey, let's not throw the baby out with the bath water. What's valuable in these muddy waters is precisely that baby.

When I stand at my kitchen sink, I look at my window sill and I see two fledgling plants, marigold and impatiens, lovingly potted in plastic cups by my sons. Every day I check to see if they need water, and when the sun streams through the window I can't help but smile contentedly. The marigold, planted completely from scratch, was beginning to droop, so I added more soil and now it has had a noticeable growing spurt, with a tiny but promising bud appearing. The impatiens, planted later, has great and obvious potential and is blossoming beautifully. This is my life. Watching, pruning, feeding, admiring, hoping. It is why I can embrace, with sincerity, the importance of taking time to smell the roses (and the dandelions, too). □

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MICROSCOPIC RIGHTS

An expanding constitutional universe

In early March, the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals, in the case of *Compassion in Dying* v. *State of Washington*, announced the discovery of a new "fundamental right" in the United States Constitution, a right to assisted suicide.

It's amazing what can be seen with these new judicial microscopes, developed by the same people who made the Hubble telescope. It has been more than a century-and-a-quarter since passage of the Fourteenth Amendment and more than two centuries since the Bill of Rights, yet in all this time no one's eyesight was acute enough to discover this right. Using a high-powered judicial microscope, however, the Ninth Circuit was able to spot this marvelous constitutional provision: it's written in teeny-weeny letters, invisible to the naked eye, in the tail of one of the commas of the Fourteenth Amendment. (This is an improved version of the microscope used in 1973 by the Supreme Court when it discovered another fundamental right, abortion, which, we now know, had been inscribed in minute script in the upper portion of the same comma.)

Sad to say, three judges out of the court's eleven were not able to discern the right to suicide, despite the microscope. But this is the same proportion of the American population that fails to master any new technology, just under 30 percent. I bet these three judges don't know how to use ATM cards either.

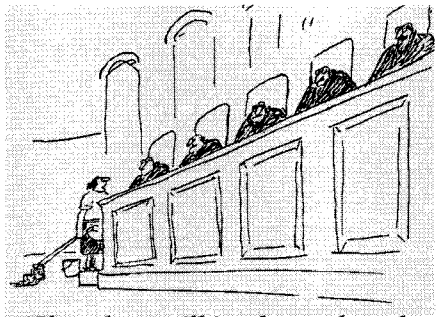
Judge Stephen Reinhardt, who wrote the majority opinion, is not only a virtuoso at this new optico-juridical technology; he is also, it turns out, a great sociologist, able to assure us that "there is no reason to believe that legalizing assisted suicide will lead to the horrific consequences its opponents suggest."

Panicky people fear that constitutionalization of assisted suicide will lead to pressures on old people to speed up their deaths, pressures originating in some cases from impatient relatives but more often from cost-conscious health insurance providers, including government. These worrywarts have even coined a new name for the thing they fear: "seniorcide" or "elderly genocide."

Others worry that if assisted suicide is a "fundamental right" there will be no logical way to limit this right to a small number of hard cases, just as we cannot limit the right of abortion to hard cases. If something's a fundamental right, then it's a fundamental right; it should be available to everybody in virtually all circumstances.

Still others worry that making suicide a constitutional right is tantamount to declaring it a moral right, since in America that's the way we view constitutional rights; and that this "moralization" of suicide will increase its attractiveness and acceptability among the young.

Not to worry. Judge Reinhardt has turned sociology into a predictive science, something sociologists themselves have been trying to do, without success, for the last century-and-a-half. He has seen the future, and it works. It is a future in which assisted suicide is compassionate, rational, and tidy; in which everything else goes on as usual with this single happy exception—a few people in desperate pain are allowed to make a voluntary exodus; a future, in short, in which the foolish decisions of the likes of Judge Reinhardt have no "horrific consequences."



"If you boys will just let me through, I won't be a minute."

At about this point somebody will object, "So you don't like the conclusion the Ninth Circuit has arrived at. So what? Your ridicule doesn't change the fact that the decision is judicially sound. It follows quite logically from Supreme Court precedents, especially *Roe* (1973) and *Casey* (1992). There is a straight line from *Griswold* (1965) to *Compassion in Dying*. Maybe you don't like it, but that's the way the system works."

I confess to the sin of not being a lawyer, and to the even greater sin of not being a professor of constitutional law; but it seems to me there is something odd in the logic used by many American legal minds. In other fields of intellectual endeavor the *reductio ad absurdum* is recognized as a valid logical move: if your premises lead to absurd conclusions, there must be something wrong with your premises. But in constitutional law the opposite principle prevails: if your premises lead to absurdities (for example, that there are fundamental constitutional rights to abortion and assisted suicide), then you should lovingly embrace the conclusions and declare, despite appearances, that they are not the least bit absurd.

"A foolish consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds," said Emerson. He might have added, "—and of big judges." Normal people think common sense is entitled to trump consistency when the two conflict. Legal theorists of the Blackmun/Reinhardt persuasion think it works the other way round.

I regret the flippant tone of this column, especially when speaking of one of the three grand divisions of the federal government. Respect for courts, above all the highest federal courts, is one of the great foundations of liberty and social order in this country, and I am reluctant to contribute to the erosion of this respect. My car does not sport one of those bumper stickers that says, "Question authority."

But what is one to do? It is not the crit-

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ics who damage the legitimacy of courts so much as it is the courts who undermine their own legitimacy by inventing constitutional provisions that outrage both common sense and the moral feelings of vast numbers of Americans. When courts do this, how can we persuade ourselves to respect them? If you prick us, do we not bleed?

And if we are told, "That's the way the system works," we answer that that's not the way the system was supposed to work at all. For these decisions are not only preposterous in content but undemocratic in method. In creating rights of suicide and abortion, judges—unelected aristocrats with life tenure—abolish rights of legislatures and the people who elect them. If homicidal rights are to be created at all, this should be done via the democratic process.

To be fair, however, it should be noted that in its graciousness the judiciary has allowed us to remain a democracy in a hundred small matters while reserving to itself the authority to decide only the really big questions. So don't worry. Democracy won't disappear entirely until the Supreme Court brings the method of filling potholes under the rubric of constitutional rights—and this won't happen for another twenty or thirty years at the earliest. □

Paul Moses

'ONE OF US'

Dad listens to daughter

I was surprised one morning to find that my twelve-year-old daughter wanted me to listen to her radio station. Normally my reaction to the program being aired ranges from making a face to ordering it shut off. But, bubbling with enthusiasm, Caitlin insisted she had found the perfect song for the eighth-grade religious education class I teach.

Sure enough, a woman was singing, "Yeah, yeah, God is great, yeah, yeah, God is good." The singer wondered what it would be like to see the face of God, and if seeing God's face would make her believe in heaven, in Jesus, the saints, and the prophets. And what, she asked, if God were one of us, a stranger encountered on the bus? How would we react?

Like many other people, I reacted to Joan Osborne's rendition of "One of Us" by buying her new album, "Relish." For this was truly a rare event: Someone was singing about God on the crassest of drive-time formats. Clearly, the sentiments expressed by the song were also something the public wanted. The song carried Osborne, a previous unknown, to five Grammy nominations, including Record of the Year, Album of the Year, and Best New Artist. (She didn't win.)

In useful ways, "One of Us" raised the basic issues I wanted my students, who were preparing for Confirmation, to think about. What would it be like to encounter God? And how would I be changed by that encounter? I was concerned about a theological point, the qualifying "what if" in the key line, "what if God was one of us." For Jesus Christ is God with us. With that proviso, I played the song for my class and found that the combination of its lyrics and polished sound helped open up discussions about the nature of God.

In the meantime, I tried to learn more about Osborne. Her CD made it clear that she was no Christian rocker. Another song, "Let's Just Get Naked," established that much. A solicitation for donations to Rock for Choice and other pro-choice groups on the CD made it unlikely that she would sing at a the next papal Mass in Central Park. Another important bit of information on the album jacket was that Osborne did not write "One of Us." It was penned by Eric Bazilian, a member of the Hooters. After listening to the album, I decided that Osborne exhibits what Andrew Greeley has described as "the Catholic imagination." Greeley cites Bruce Springsteen as a prime example of how images and even an outlook absorbed during a Catholic upbringing can stay with an artist later in life. Osborne, it turned out, is a lapsed Catholic and her music is sprinkled with references to saints and sinners. One song she co-wrote, "Saint Teresa," speaks of a streetwalker who is "higher than the moon." The connection with Saint Teresa was more than a bit strained to say the least.

The enormous popularity of "One of Us," it seems to me, reveals that Americans, if given the opportunity, will flock to buy music that awakens or perhaps satisfies their spiritual hunger. As *Entertainment Weekly* put it, the song "filled a God-sized hole in the Top Ten."

Unfortunately, the spiritual aspect of contemporary pop music often is overlooked by music critics. A group called Crash Test Dummies deliberates on the existence of God and the afterlife in a number of songs. The Irish rock band U-2's work expresses a strong spiritual dimension. Van Morrison's album "Hymns to the Silence" is, as the title indicates, filled with hymns. Enya ponders the angels. Billy Joel, once castigated for singing that "Catholic girls start much too late," has become a spiritual seeker in middle age in his "River of

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Dreams" album. Sting's new album has a song with the chorus, "Let your soul guide you." Pop music is not only about "losing my religion." It is, arguably, also about seeking it.

Within the church, too, there's been a retreat from an engagement with what is good in popular culture. In the years immediately after the Second Vatican Council, folk Mass groups in many parishes and schools borrowed contemporary music or lyrics for worship, a practice that has since faded (okay, maybe for the better in many cases). But there is still some good popular music to be found, and it should be pointed out. This was done in a grand way at Pope John Paul II's Mass in Baltimore, when he entered to the unlikely sound of the group Boyz II Men.

So I was disappointed to read one morning in the *New York Post* that the song "One of Us" was being described as anti-Catholic. And sure enough, the Catholic League for Religious and Civil Rights had issued a release quoting its president, William Donohue, as saying that Osborne's songs "dance awfully close to the line of Catholic baiting." Now, I do not oppose Donohue's concern about anti-Catholic prejudice in the news and entertainment media. He has had a number of hits. But this looked to me like a miss.

Donohue especially objected to one line in the song's chorus, which asked what it would be like if God became one of us, "just a slob like one of us." Was Osborne calling God a slob?

This was a tortured reading of a song that simply asked how we would react to God if God was just an average person encountered in our everyday lives. It was not exactly a new idea: "Lord, when was it we saw you hungry and gave you food?"

I called Donohue and told him that I thought the song was pretty good. (In fact, I later discovered, a youth commission in my home diocese of Brooklyn used it for a program with teen-agers.) He explained that the Catholic League was taking "kind of a prophylactic approach. Here is a new rising star who is dancing close to the edge....We don't feel it would be a good move on our part to say nothing." Osborne's work "is not the worst thing I've seen," he said. But, he continued, "Cultures aren't changed as a result of one incident. Cultures are changed as a result of patterns."

The cultural pattern, I believe, is that longing for spirituality is so strong in our society that it is finding its way even into the very secular world of the pop charts. "One of Us " is not a religious song. Like the recent songs by Billy Joel and Crash Test Dummies, it is about alienation from God. In "One of Us," the God-among-us is a lonely stranger on a bus, with "nobody calling on the phone, 'cept for the pope, maybe, in Rome." In other words, only organized religion has tried to keep in touch with God.

But I can't find anything in this particular song that dances close to Catholic-baiting. And Osborne, who has said in a letter to fans that "the church's attitudes toward women and gays make the pope look far more ridiculous than any pop song could," did not write the song, which speaks of the pope only with respect. Bazilian, who was raised Jewish and attended Quaker schools, penned it, and he's at a loss to explain where it came from. "I just take credit for being the scribe," he said in an interview in the *Washington Post*. "I thought, 'This song knows what it's saying even though I don't.'"

Bazilian has written a song about longing, pop music's overarching theme. Without quite realizing it, he tapped into America's longing for God. □

Paul Moses *covers New York City Hall for* Newsday.

Nick DiSpoldo

THREE-STRIKES LAWS

Cruel & unusual?

Many states in the Union now have "three-strikes" laws mandating a twenty-five-year-to-life sentence for anyone convicted of a third serious or violent offense. California, unlike other states, however, also has a "petty with a prior" law which provides that petty theft can be charged as a felony if the defendant has a prior felony conviction. The two laws are now being applied in tandem, with results that call for reflection, given California's frequent role as trend-setter and the dividends for tough-on-crime electioneering in many other states. A few examples:

- A Sacramento man was given a life sentence for stealing two packs of cigarettes.
- In San Bernardino, a man who stole one slice of pizza got life.
- Kevin T. Weber of Santa Ana, who burglarized a restaurant and stole four chocolate chip cookies, was charged and convicted under the three-strikes law. Informed of the sentence Weber faced, the restaurant owner was appalled. "I think he should pay for what he's done—probably clean up the freeway or something. But twenty-five years? I'm surprised. I'm shocked."

So are others, including defense attorneys, judges, and even some prosecutors. When Arthur Daniel DuBois drew a life sentence for stealing an air compressor in Victorville, Deputy Public Defender Michael Kennedy was incensed that the jury returned a guilty verdict knowing it would result in a life sentence for his client. "This," he said, "may signal that the jury isn't the protectionist institution it's supposed to be." And when Los Angeles District Attorney Gil Garcetti sought a third-strike conviction against a homeless man accused of possessing three-tenths of a gram of cocaine, Superior Court Judge David P. Yaffe reacted strongly, telling the jury that the district attorney's office was guilty of a "gross abuse of prosecutorial discretion" in the case. If Garcetti refused to exercise "the discretion that is allowed to him by law and is part of his job," said the judge, "then he is a craven coward who is afraid to do his sworn duty." If Garcetti's

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purpose was to show that the three-strikes law doesn't work, "then he is an arrogant bureaucrat who is trying to make fools of the 70 percent of Californians who voted for that law."

Another prosecutor, Deputy District Attorney David Bristow of San Bernardino County, took a different course: He resigned his position rather than prosecute nonviolent offenders under the three-strikes law. In his explanation, Bristow said: "It is purely a moral issue between me and the voters of California."

But the question at issue is legal and constitutional as well as moral, involving as it does the time-honored principle of proportionality, a staple of English common law. Three chapters of the *Magna Carta* (1215) were devoted to the rule that "amercements" (similar to modern fines) must not be excessive. When prison sentences became the common method of punishing criminals, the same standard was applied, as in a statute enacted in 1275: "Imprisonment ought always to be according to the quality of the offense."

That thirteenth-century language was echoed by the U.S. Supreme Court in its 1910 decision, *Weems* v. *United States*, in which the prisoner had been sentenced to fifteen years at hard labor for falsifying a public document. Canceling the sentence, the Court noted: "It is a precept of justice that punishment for crime should be graduated and proportioned to the offense."

More recently (1983), the U. S. Supreme Court in a 5-4 decision canceled the sentence—life without possibility of parole—given to Jerry Helm under South Dakota's habitual criminal code for passing a worthless $100 check (*Solem* v. *Helm*). Though it was Helm's seventh conviction, none of his crimes was violent or directed against persons. Justice Lewis Powell's majority opinion found that Helm had received "the penultimate sentence for relatively minor criminal conduct," and therefore ran afoul of the Eighth Amendment's ban on "cruel and unusual punishment."

In passing, the Court noted that Helm had been dealt with more harshly than he would have been in any other jurisdiction, with the sole exception of Nevada, a state that has long made use of its Habitual Criminal Act. But the life sentence available in Nevada is discretionary with the court and is rarely imposed by Nevada judges. Rather, it is used by the state's prosecutors to intimidate repeat felons into pleading guilty to the pending charge; if they refuse they are then charged as habitual criminals.

Apart from the moral and legal questions, critics of California's three-strikes law cite the economic burdens it imposes on local governments. Defendants faced with life sentences have nothing to lose; most demand jury trials, which clog court calendars at great expense to taxpayers. Los Angeles County Supervisor Gloria Molina told a legislative panel that implementing the law cost her county $100 million in its first year and predicted that the tab would rise to $300 million in the current fiscal year. Molina's spokesperson, Michael Bustamante, reported dramatic increases in caseloads for district attorneys and public defenders, overcrowding of jails, and significant court backlogs.

Another criticism is that current practice departs from the original justification for three-strikes laws: they were meant to put violent offenders permanently behind bars. Applying them against pathetic social nuisances, apart from its lack of proportionality, does little or nothing to enhance public safety. Further: the very concept behind three-strikes laws abandons the possibility of rehabilitation, when in fact even a person convicted of three felonies can change.

Such considerations are simply ignored by political candidates exploiting the national concern about rising crime rates by running let's-get-tough-on-criminals campaigns. It's a safe platform; it won't offend any significant bloc of voters and it enables campaigners to keep silent on more divisive, controversial issues.

But it is proportionality, not economics or penology, that is the issue with constitutional dimensions. There can be no certainty, however, that if (more likely, when) three-strike laws are tested in the Supreme Court, the *Weems* and *Helm* precedents will stand. Justices Thurgood Marshall, William Brennan, Harry Blackmun, and John Paul Stevens voted with Powell in the *Helm* case; only Stevens remains. Then Justice William Rehnquist and Justice Sandra Day O'Connor dissented. If they vote as they did on *Helm*, and are joined by any three of the "new" justices—Clarence Thomas, David Souter, Anthony Kennedy, Ruth Bader Ginsburg, and Stephen Breyer—*Helm* might well be reversed.

In Victor Hugo's classic *Les Misérables*, the protagonist Jean Valjean, convicted of stealing a loaf of bread, is sentenced to twenty years at hard labor. Not even Hugo, even in the harsh context of France's criminal justice system, might have been able to imagine a life sentence for stealing a slice of pizza. □

"Personally I like you, but the mood of the country dictates that I stick it to you good."

Nick DiSpoldo *is a free-lance writer and paralegal who lives in Yermo, California. He acquired his knowledge of the law while serving time in four state prisons.*

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A MODEST PROPOSAL

A place for women in the hierarchy

Mary Douglas

In 1976 the Vatican issued a formal *Declaration on the Admission of Women to the Ministerial Priesthood*. It expounded three main arguments against the ordination of women. One was respect for the ancient tradition of the nuptial mystery, Christ as the Heavenly Bridegroom, the church as the bride. The second was the idea of the "natural sign"; the religious teaching must be based on signs which are readily (naturally) interpretable by all. For example, the church has used the idea of procreation and the union between male and female as a sign for God's intimate and loving relation to his church. A man is an exemplar of masculinity which enables the priest to represent Christ in the mystery of God made man.

The third, and in my opinion the crucial, point made in the document is that the doctrine of the nuptial mystery sums up the way the church has always seen her own identity, and links this identity with the nuptial mystery in the Bible. The church cherishes the continuity with Israel depicted by the prophets: "for God, the Chosen People is seen as his ardently loved spouse." Israel was feminine and and the church is feminine, therefore the priest representing Christ has to be masculine. And therefore by their gender, women are precluded from being ordained.

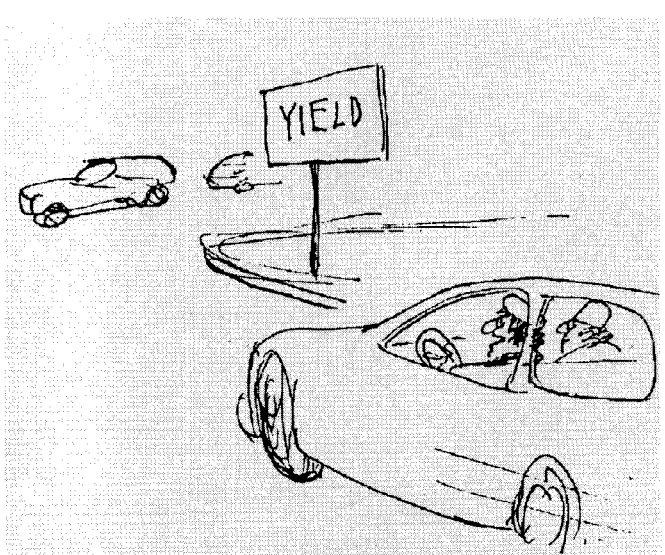
Supporters of ordaining women dismiss the Vatican's reasoning outright. For them, the document exemplifies exactly the inflexible traditionalism that is at issue. How is the church ever going to come up to date and develop her doctrines in the light of modern times if every mythological detail must be adhered to? It tries to justify a patriarchal theology by reference to a patriarchal book, the Bible, and an obsolete patriarchal society, ancient Judaism.

The controversy is hot with prejudice, so it is best to declare one's own. For one, I absolutely agree that the role of women in the church is inadequate. What the most extreme feminist critics say about the actual standing of women is justified. It is a male-dominated institution, and was so even in the heyday of powerful Mother Abbesses. But I should also make clear that I am not in favor of ordaining women.

Feminists have two viable positions on gender. One is to play it down, reduce its importance, and then to see no reason why gender difference should intervene in the decision about the priesthood. The other is to play up the significance of gender. The latter is my own inclination. Absorbing women into the existing religious institutions is seen by some as putting power behind the women's voice for change. But this is a long shot. As an objective it is unimaginative and guaranteed to generate hostility. The main issue is so grave that it requires a radical approach. We would do better to take the nuptial mystery and run with it, not against it.

If we respect a religious institution, we cannot dismiss out of hand its claim to honor its continuity with its own past. The scholars at the Vatican see an element of betrayal in going back on what has been decided by their deceased predecessors. Any community has a certain way of perceiving its own historic identity. Telling its members to forget their common past and make new myths of present reality is the same as telling them to get lost, die off, and disappear.

Ask the critics what is wrong with the sacred marriage idiom, and they reply, nothing in itself, if it means the union of the soul with God, but everything if it is used to justify an internal principle of organization. Women cannot ever be ordained because of their gender—this is the problem. But gender as a sign may not be as restrictive as our present experience suggests.



"Personally, I prefer just to barge the hell through."

Mary Douglas, *an anthropologist, is the author of* Natural Symbols *(1970) and, most recently,* In the Wilderness *(1993), among many other works. This essay has been adapted from "The Gender of the Beloved," and is reprinted with the permission of the* Heythrop Journal. *The original essay was written in honor of the Reverend Robert Murray, S.J.*

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First, consider how far gender can stray from its origins as a "natural sign." In politics, gender is widely used as a paradigm of complementary relationship. An ideal pattern of male and female in harmonious conjugal relationship exemplified the relation between spheres of authority in medieval political theory, between church and state, or pope and emperor. In this context, as is the case with many languages, genders' erotic or sexual references are bypassed. To be sure, gender as the model of complementarity is not merely a local Western idea. All over the world complementary institutional roles are given genderized titles, with the gender metaphor often emphasizing partnership and mutual support.

The main issue is so grave that it requires a radical approach. We would do better to take the nuptial mystery and run with it, not against it.

Marshall Sahlins's account (*Islands of History*, 1985) of the sexual metaphor in Hawaiian culture is especially instructive in this regard. The idea of sex runs riotously through Hawaiian politics and official life as well as uninhibitedly through personal relations. Anything that can possibly carry an unabashed sexual allusion does so, and if it is obscure to us, it is not so to Hawaiians. The people think and dream and pursue their ambitions in a libidinous idiom. But the word idiom should not suggest that sexual politics do not concern power, marriages, and property. It is implausible to suggest that Polynesian women are subservient to males, and Hawaiian men say ruefully that the women always win. Anyone who feels that the Bride of Christ is a restrictive model which straitjackets the lowly role of women in the church should read Sahlins's book. Gender is a flexible notion which can be and is used in any of a wide variety of ways, and need not necessarily serve as a natural sign of family control in a patriarchal system.

Still, feminist critics of the church might prefer to make a clean sweep of gender elements. They may even persuade the pope and cardinals that they should bring the church up to date by purging the doctrine of sexual allusion. But there are real losses to consider. For example, in *The Pilgrim's Progress*, since the gender of the beloved object is not specified, erotic elements which in other mythologies add spice to the soul's journey are missing. Purging eroticism is liable to thin the quality of the myth. It would be ironic for the church, blamed for repressing women and for an overly strict sexual ruling as regards contraception, also to be reproached for clinging to a metaphor of sexual reproduction. I would argue that the sexual metaphor is a good thing to cling to, not something that women should lightly reject. I would further ask whether that very metaphor cannot be used more creatively for organizing the modern church. For organization is the issue.

When the church's use of the gender model is being criticized it is the form of society that is on trial, not a form of words. Many of the burning questions underlying the women-priests controversy are about forms of organization. A specific form of organization goes with each version of the nuptial mystery. In a society in which sex is free and competitive—as it is in much of the Western world—the gendered religious mythology is utterly different from the biblical model which the Vatican understands itself to have inherited.

No one would deny that the Roman church is hierarchical. We may dislike hierarchy, but as a form of organization it is not intrinsically bad. It has problems, but these are not insoluble. That the church sees herself as a hierarchical system is another of the self-perceptions that we should respect, because it runs very deep. If everyone ostensibly engaged in a debate about women priests is actually arguing about forms of society, would it not be better to give up pretense of a burning concern for women to be ordained and to focus directly on the passionate concern for equality?

For example, when I read Rosemary Ruether's theology I forget that the argument is about women; it is more obviously about promoting an egalitarian organizational principle. But I myself have a deep fear of vaunted egalitarianism. It means, when I have heard it, a

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ruleless system, which means one in which the loudest voice has the main say, and woe to the weakest. In mixed company, the woman is generally the weakest. Does Christianity really imply egalitarianism? Or might the protections and sense of community afforded by hierarchy also reflect a genuine Christian vision?

There are plenty of nonhierarchical Christian churches with very impressive records, but the Catholic church is inherently hierarchical. There may still be room for a church that worships God in a hierarchical way. In any event, you can tell a hierarchical institution to become egalitarian till you are blue in the face, and nothing will happen. No one would know where to start. But tell it to reform the hierarchy and something might actually be done. If the women protesting against Rome's treatment of women are to succeed in bringing a new regime to birth, I think they have a better chance if they can work with hierarchical principles rather than trying to abolish them. It is possible that women can achieve everything that they need, and far more than they have imagined they need, without negating the nuptial mystery, indeed, even invoking it to justify an equal share of authority for women.

An impoverished idea of hierarchy is part of our Western contemporary world view. We tend to think of it as operating solely in the up-down dimension. The simple up-down model tends to be rigid, resistant to change, and brittle. More typically, however, a hierarchy has a cognitive bias toward working in ordered pairs, the members of the pair unequal, one weak, the other strong, but the inequality changing at different levels or in different contexts. The institution that is hierarchically ordered in this way is strengthened by a criss-cross of complementary statuses.

Africa provides the model I have in mind, particularly the women of Africa. I want to call attention to those cultures which have instituted queen mothers to balance the role of the king and his male councilors. In Cameroon, in Nigeria, in Dahomey, and Benin, hereditary male-dominated hierarchical systems have their internal checks and balances worked out on the principle of gender. Countervailing powers are male and female, in religion and in the secular sphere. This gender principle is quite compatible with the Vatican's principle of natural signs. Women exemplify fertility, sexuality, life, love, and beauty, and their gender is given an institutional form that counterbalances male authority and power.

Wherever there is a male principle of control in these African kingdoms, it is counterbalanced by a female principle. Every king has a mother; even if his mother is dead, he has to have an official mother; she has a court of dignitaries and a tribunal at which appropriate cases are tried. Formally the system resembles the separate religious courts which in Europe used to try cases that were not allowed to be tried in the civil courts. Such a system provides a reserve of authority to prevent excessive violence or abuse of power. The political units at each lower level of the hierarchy repeat the pattern. At district level there is a leader of women, who are organized to support each other, and the same at the village level, a female leader and an effective organization. Under this system women are in the habit of mobilizing to the defense of other women, and insisting on their dignity and rights. When they are mobilized at the highest level they are representing the interests of the whole community, whether it is at the village level, protesting at a road being built, or at the state level, protesting against poll tax, or at a national or humanitarian level. Something of this kind is what we need much more than we need ordination of women to the priesthood.

At present in the Catholic church there is no organization

Michael Cadnum

The Centrifugal Force Ride

So much of a year
is given to us, ready-made.
Morning, and then the heat.
Sometimes a whole day goes by
and it's hard to notice.

Unless it breaks, unless
the weather opens, a week
is flat, the neighbor
across the street killing weeds
with a long thin pipe that spurts fire.

Even joy arrives in pieces,
ready to be assembled, flatbed trucks
and thin, unshaven men who
tug tarps and scatter cables across grass.

It's a cage that revolves,
tilting, spinning people the way
the spin cycle spins clothes.
It wheels people up into the air
and around so fast they can't move.
They laugh as the sky
opens and closes its mouth.

And when we line up,
flattening the dark grass, tickets
in hand, we are doing what
we are supposed to do,
in love with the circle of light.

We spread our arms
and we don't fall.

Some people say we are in love
with death. But we are in love
with life the way we find it.
All the way home we hear the screams.

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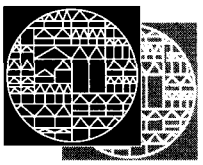
of women. Women organize themselves at low levels in lots of ways. But there is no high-level commission of women that could balance, still less outface, the cardinals. The Vatican document's reiterated assertions that women are highly valued and honored are, to women's ears, implausible. If women are the other half of humanity, they should not be left out of the church's official structure. There should be a commission for women, entrusted with specific areas of responsibility; anything that is proposed in those areas should be passed first by the Women's Commission on Doctrine. If they approve, there is no problem; if they do not approve what is being proposed, they should have a power of veto.

Just think what this would mean for the present organization of the church. First, think of the anxious care with which such a commission would be recruited. Presumably it would be constituted with a balance of celibate women in religious orders and married women with children. Presumably the ages would have to be balanced, too. Think also of the qualifications for membership, particularly education in theology, philosophy, and church history, and perhaps signs of an irreproachable life. Administrative experience might be made to count, too. The males in the church, relieved of the danger of being replaced by female priests, might well have to worry whether they were being outflanked by powerful, more highly educated females. Think what a shot in the arm this would be for European and American Catholic women, to be able to collaborate with the women of Africa and Polynesia and the Far East, who are politically so experienced and socially so articulate and effective.

How would the women's powers be circumscribed? What areas of faith and morals would be allocated to their specific care? This would be the most central issue of all. The obvious topics on which women could be expected to advise the Holy See would surely be women's concerns, connected with life, that is with procreation and dying. It would be appropriate if advice to the magisterium from the Women's Commission were specifically focused on contraception, abortion, biogenetics, and euthanasia. But it would be a pity to restrict the range of topics referred to the commission.

The main merit of this suggestion is that it is not an attack on a form of words, but an institutional change. It does not subvert hierarchical principles, but introduces a countervailing power to strengthen the hierarchy. It does not break the link with the Bible, since it is a new way of appreciating and enacting the feminine principle in the church. It does not undermine the notion of gender as a natural sign, but suggests how it could be more potently celebrated. A Catholic Commission of Women would reinforce the place of the nuptial mystery in Christian theology. It would not deny but allow a stronger focus on the theme of the church as the Bride of Christ. Our theological reflection, which has traditionally found a mysterious mirror of God's identity in human sexuality, would be deepened, not diverted. □



COMMONWEAL

The Next Generation

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as we approach the summer.

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A WELFARE PRIMER

What's happened & what's likely to happen

Thomas Massaro

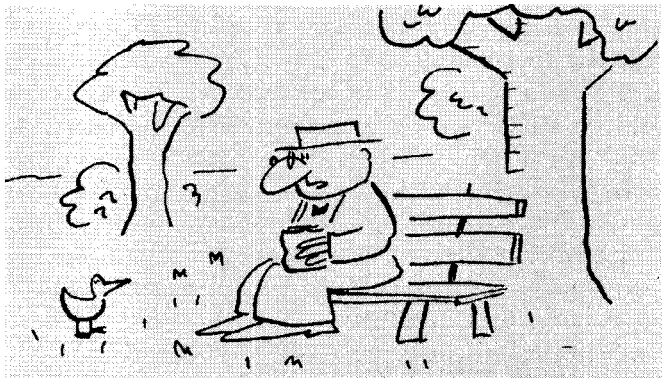
Washington, D.C. is about to begin something of an extended summer vacation from the welfare-reform debate. With a temporary lull in the budget battles and election-year distractions, federal welfare policy is being placed on the back burner. This "time out" can give political leaders as well as the general public an opportunity to evaluate the flurry of the past year's welfare-reform activity.

Recall the key events in the most recent attempt at reform. In March 1995, shortly after capturing Congress, Newt Gingrich's Republican majority ushered through the House of Representatives "The Personal Responsibility Act," one of the ten planks of the "Contract with America." Its provisions included the repeal of Title IV of the Social Security Act of 1935, eliminating Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC), the federally funded but state-administered program most Americans refer to as "welfare." Adoption of this measure by the Senate and the president (a president who had campaigned on the promise "to end welfare as we know it") would have spelled the end of Washington's commitment to guaranteeing income security to poor families. Instead of AFDC matching grants, the states would receive capped block grants from Washington, with wide discretion for how to distribute aid to poor children and their single parents. The few strings that were attached to the House version of the welfare bill were intended to reduce dependency and illegitimacy by encouraging states to do what many governors already favored: implementing family caps (no additional benefits for each newborn), time limitation of benefits ("two years and out"), categorical exclusions (teen-age mothers and most immigrants would become ineligible), workfare requirements, and other behavioral restrictions. Since "entitlement" had become a dirty word in U.S. politics—at least entitlements for the poor—the federal government was basically going out of the business of poor relief.

After months of delay and debate, during which Senate Democrats were repeatedly outflanked and eventually outvoted, the House version was moderated somewhat by the Senate and by a congressional joint conference committee. Clinton's veto of the final version in January 1996 was prompted not only by the intricacies of the then-raging budget battle, but also by a Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) report that the welfare bill passed by Congress would have pushed 1.2 million more children into poverty. The last gasp for those favoring welfare reform in 1996 on the federal level (program changes on the state level will be discussed below) came from Republican congressional strategists in the spring. They floated plans to corner Clinton into signing a bill that resembled versions of welfare reform for which he had previously expressed approval. After this initiative was dropped, candidates Clinton and Dole fired a series of mid-May salvos on welfare reform which briefly seemed translatable into genuine legislative progress. But their posturing was soon revealed to be more about stealing welfare as a campaign issue from the other side than about shaping real reform, so we can now safely say that welfare reform has indeed entered its "summer vacation."

The past year's acrimonious debate has shed some light along with considerable heat. Many of the social and economic realities connected to welfare should now be in sharper focus, such as the causes of poverty, the effectiveness of potential policy changes, and the political and social values which influence our perceptions of the problem of poverty and the role of social policy. What follows is a discussion of the lessons learned in the past year.

1. Ideology makes bad social policy. The debate began when Republicans campaigned on the theme that the "opportunity society" should replace the "welfare state." But like the caffeine or sugar buzz that accompanies indulgence in "comfort foods," the satisfaction of citing free-market bromides or "pull yourself up by your bootstraps" social theory soon wears off. Good social policy must consider the central questions: How will a new policy direction affect actual people? Will program rules and procedures extend a hand of real opportunity to single mothers to improve their difficult



"I won't give you a handout, but I'll help you find a job."

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lives? Will the 9 million children whose families rely upon AFDC, food stamps, and Medicaid to scrape by find themselves falling through gaps in the social safety net? Will taxpayers be able to see any welfare policy as an instrument of effective social policy and compassion, rather than as wasteful giveaways that mock their work efforts?

Good policy does not always make for good politics. Commitment to the well-being of poor families costs money and also risks the appearance of undermining some of the core values of the meritocratic American ethos. The safer, more popular strategy for politicians is to favor policies that make for slick soundbites—cynically to reaffirm rigid moral platitudes, to reinforce existing stereotypes of the poor, to blame low-income families for their poverty, and to ignore the complex structural determinants of economic inequality.

The American electorate, however, should be suspicious of those who pander to public anger over spending on the poor. Public support of program reforms should hinge not just on how many tax dollars would be saved, but also on how these proposals treat the poor among us. Will they offer needy families adequate security in the short-run and realistic hope and opportunity for a better life in the long-run?

2. There are no simple solutions to the complex problem of persistent poverty. The search for a single villain or a neat plot line in the saga of U.S. poverty is fruitless. Homelessness and hunger in the wealthiest society in human history create a paradox that defies any short-cuts to understanding. It does little good to rely on monocausal explanations—whether one places blame upon business for the exploitation of labor, upon government programs for fostering dependency, or upon low-income people themselves for engaging in destructive behavior that can lead to dependency, illegitimacy, and unemployment. There is plenty of blame to go round; simply blaming the victim won't do.

Commentators such as Charles Murray (*Losing Ground*) and Lawrence Mead (*The New Politics of Poverty*) make sweeping claims about the dynamics of poverty. In doing so they exaggerate the influence of selected parts of the overall picture: the supposed incompatibility of compassion and work incentives, "helping conundrums" that seem to doom social policy to eternal failure, and the salience of unintended consequences of policies that reward dependency and destructive behavior by cushioning their effects. Is it merely coincidence that these commentators emphasize causal factors which suggest solutions that mirror their political agenda (smaller government, budget cuts) and preferred social theory (rugged individualism, laissez-faire economics)?

After years of listening to the claims and counterclaims of would-be welfare reformers, Americans now show signs of rejecting such false choices. By seeing through these smokescreens, the welfare reform debate can move to a more constructive emphasis on what it might take truly to improve the untidy lives of poor families. To be sure, it is well and good to recommend the moral renewal of family values and the work ethic (as do Newt Gingrich, William Bennett, Murray, Mead, Marvin Oulasky, Gertrude Himmelfarb, and a host of others on the right). But the practical measures necessary to actually improve the lot of the poor must include improvements in at least four specific areas: (1) the child-support enforcement system; (2) job training; (3) health-care benefits for low-wage workers; and (4) day-care programs for single mothers. Government can make a positive contribution in all these cases.

Improvements in these social supports may sound like a mere wish list of expensive proposals unless we realize that each item on the list is a good investment—spending a bit now will realize much larger long-term gains. The first two items require start-up costs (already pioneered under provisions of the Family Support Act of 1988) that promise to repay themselves many times over. They encourage income (from absent fathers and earnings from single mothers) that in many cases may replace welfare checks. The final two items may have similar cost-saving effects. Each encourages work by making work logistically possible and potentially more attractive than staying on welfare.

Clinton's original 1994 welfare reform proposal included versions of these four positive measures, but was unfairly criticized as just another costly social program. Actually, no one is seriously arguing that we can simply spend our way out of the welfare mess. The challenge is to recognize when certain investments in enabling people or preventing dependency are prudent. The "how" becomes as important as the "what," for these measures work best when implemented and managed on a flexible and perhaps local basis, as several recent state welfare experiments have demonstrated. While it is true that there are no "silver bullets" that solve all our welfare problems at low cost, it is possible to alleviate the burdens of poor families in ways consistent with the American values of freedom, limited government, the work ethic, and personal responsibility.

3. Pay attention to the many different ways welfare is used and might better be used. New evidence about the recipients of income support reveals that there is no single pattern of how families make use of AFDC. Ronald Reagan's "welfare queen" may have cheated the system and confirmed our fears of widespread intergenerational dependency, but she seems to be mostly the stuff of convenient myth. Most welfare families take advantage of their first realistic opportunity to leave the AFDC rolls. The frequent "recycling" of single mothers back into the welfare system is caused by the labor market's inability to provide a living wage (and adequate benefits, including health care) for low-skilled workers. If poor mothers lie to caseworkers by not reporting outside income while collecting AFDC, it is because benefit levels in most states are too low (and declining in real terms) to pay for even the barest necessities.

The nearly 5 million adults collecting AFDC are mostly low-skilled single mothers struggling to support their 9 million

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children, who represent a significant percentage of America's next generation. Even the most cursory glance at the social location of these families reveals that any of the solely work-based and largely punitive solutions to dependency proposed by many Republicans cannot succeed. Barriers to employment for this population of single mothers include declining prospects in a deteriorating job market, poor health, frequent depression, child-care responsibilities, and limited transportation to inaccessible work sites.

Workfare, the principle of "income by work effort alone," which replaces "income by entitlement" (where cash grants are received as long as a family fits the proper categories and means-tests), is the centerpiece of most current welfare-reform proposals. But to adopt workfare as a universal norm would commit our nation to a needlessly inflexible policy. Under the banner of "getting tough on work," many types of parents with vastly different needs and capabilities are lumped together to face the same enforced work requirements. Upon entering a workfare program, a single mother faces a choice between finding employment in the private sector or "working off" her welfare grant in public-sector service, often in tasks of the "make-work" variety. Failure to comply with these provisions means eventual loss of benefits and the likely break-up of the family, the very outcome which the original welfare provisions of the 1935 Social Security Act were intended to prevent. The public's wholesale rejection of Speaker Gingrich's proposal last year to make widespread use of orphanages as an alternative to welfare suggests that Americans do not consider low earning ability alone a sufficient reason to judge someone an incompetent parent.

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Since American culture supports both work and family cohesion, I see two alternatives for upholding our shared values without submitting to the straitjacket of inflexible workfare arrangements.

First, we might emulate those European nations with highly developed "family policies" featuring income-support benefits such as family allowances. The operative principle remains one of entitlement, where income supplementation in the interest of providing security for poor families is seen as either an element of the national interest or as a social obligation. Although it is arguably the single most morally defensible approach to family poverty (and has been floated in Congress in various forms for decades), a proposal for an ambitious family policy is unlikely to win support amidst the present climate of budgetary restraint. Indeed, the U.S. program that most resembles a European-style family allowance, the Earned Income Tax Credit, is being scaled back in the ongoing federal budget deliberations.

A second possibility is the implementation of a flexible family support program modeled on that of Governor John Engler (R-Mich.). For Engler, welfare reform means more than simply cutting spending, but includes sensitivity to individual needs and capacities within a work-based program. Recipients sign personalized contracts that seek to move them gradually to self-sufficiency on reasonable terms that reflect not just the principle of personal responsibility in isolation, but also the availability of jobs and prevailing wage levels. Conservatives laud Engler for ending the entitlement status of benefits by making them conditional upon recipient cooperation, establishing a *quid pro quo* that promises to preserve the power of work incentives. Advocates of the poor remain nervous about the loss of income guarantees, especially for children who might be punished for the transgressions of their parents. Yet many liberals applaud Engler's exceptional commitment to providing substantial social-support services and his eschewal of strict time limits that might place some families in desperate situations. Engler's guiding principle is one of reciprocal responsibility between the recipients and providers, so that welfare mothers who do everything within their power to keep their contract will not be summarily denied benefits no matter how long it takes for their good-faith efforts to translate into economic self-sufficiency.

Engler's plan is currently being phased in throughout Michigan, a process made possible by a waiver from federal welfare rules granted by the Department of Health and Human Services. Thirty-eight states have received such waivers from the Clinton administration to implement rules changes, so that the states have indeed become welfare laboratories yielding important lessons about what works and what does not. Engler's plan is more ambitious than most state experiments, particularly in its commitment to the intensive case work necessitated by its eschewal of uniform workfare rules.

One of the attractive features of Engler's plan is something neither he nor any Republican probably intends. By being sensitive to barriers to employment and labor market conditions, the Michigan program opens a window to the possibility of viewing welfare as an ordinary mode of income supplementation for poor families facing difficult economic conditions. Among all the work-based proposals being offered, it alone responds with more than a shrug to the question: But what about those who cannot find jobs in this tight labor market? The welfare-reform debate moves light-years ahead when we grow more comfortable with the realization that, in the dawning post-industrial era, many families may require subsidies on top of what they can earn in increasingly contingent, low-wage jobs. The practice of combining work and welfare should become commonplace,

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not something forbidden by program rules.

4. Get the moral anthropology right. During the hiatus from welfare reform, the most fundamental question Americans should ponder is: Why did many of the arguments expounded in the last round of the welfare-reform debate fail to resonate with the American public? I suggest that it is because of our good common sense. Our culture's shared understanding of the human person refuses to accept caricatures, whether they come from the Left ("the poor are nothing but victims of vicious social forces") or the Right ("we should treat people as rugged individualists"). The "Contract with America" is especially egregious for promoting a two-dimensional view of humans as bloodless, rational calculators and maximizers of economic gain.

Republican welfare strategies would have us believe that the poor base their lifestyle decisions exclusively on economic motivations. "Deadbeat dads" flee responsibility solely for financial reasons. Welfare mothers deceive social workers and evade work in order to maximize their benefits. Teen-agers engage in sexual activity and bear children in order to collect welfare checks. From these premises, the authors of the "Personal Responsibility Act" proposed legislation that would overhaul U.S. social policy in ways that reflect their behavioristic anthropology. By means of the proper combination of carrots and sticks, their policies attempted to raise the cost of deviant behavior such as illegitimacy and nonwork, inducing the poor to conform to social values which they previously flouted.

This picture of human nature is flawed. Americans suspected this all along and now we are beginning to reject it openly. Yes, statecraft may include soulcraft, as there are moral dimensions of any public policy. Government programs can serve to "signal" social values. But a crass effort to coerce vulnerable segments of the population into desired behavior amounts to a denial of the dignity of free human persons. Workfare strategies are a case in point. Punitive enforcement of work requirements as a condition of receiving welfare benefits sends all the wrong messages. In the name of implementing a narrowly construed version of the value of personal responsibility, workfare stigmatizes and degrades those whose greatest fault is an inability to find private-sector employment. Strict workfare proposals ignore the deeper need for opportunities to boost skills (the key to long-range earnings potential) and to eliminate barriers to gainful employment—the very preconditions for greater self-sufficiency. While it is true that job-training programs have a mixed record of success, they at least represent an effort to address the causes of poverty (an "upstream" solution) before resorting to punitive ("downstream") measures to alter recipient behavior.

The American people by and large instinctively adhere to a more complex and adequate moral anthropology. If we wish to see such commonsensical views more fully articulated, we might look to John Paul II's encyclical on human work, *Laborem exercens*. The pope draws on the long tradition of Catholic social thought to advance not only a narrow claim about the dignity of the worker ("work is for man and not man for work" [*sic*]), but also a wider indictment of all forms of reductionism and economistic logic that threaten human dignity. The "is" and the "ought" are here linked. Because humans with our gift of freedom do not base our important life decisions (about work, marriage, procreation) solely on cost-benefit analysis, we ought not be treated as mere instruments of production by employers, nor as mere bundles of needs (to be neglected or at best "managed" in none but the most cost-efficient way) by government in its social policies.

Catholic moral anthropology explicitly endorses government action to establish the conditions necessary for legal and economic justice and respect for human rights (by promoting such measures as a "living wage" and trade unionism, for example). The documents of Catholic social teaching provide indisputable warrant for a comprehensive social safety net to protect poor families from want. Such state action is part of the legitimate role of government in protecting the social and economic rights of its citizens. The most direct way of shielding poor families from economic destitution is by guaranteeing income security to those who meet certain criteria. Such an entitlement principle pervades Catholic social teaching, whether in papal addresses, pastoral letters from the U.S. bishops, or policy recommendations from such groups as Catholic Charities USA.

Herein lies the rub. As the American political climate has grown more suspicious of government in recent years, attempts to champion any type of unconditional income guarantees for any category of citizens seem to be falling on deaf ears. Traditional American skepticism about government-administered economic rights and our current hypersensitivity to the destructive consequences of an entitlement mentality make it very difficult to defend income guarantees for poor families. The fact that a bill ending our sixty-year commitment to this principle passed both houses of Congress in 1995 should serve as a wake-up call to all concerned about the poorest Americans.

Those who argue that it is no longer politically feasible to defend a welfare entitlement may be right. But unless our basic obligations to the needy are acknowledged, legislation disastrous for poor families will be enacted before the end of 1997. Without a change of heart and thinking in Washington, D.C., any new national welfare law likely to emerge from Congress will make Engler's Michigan program appear generous by comparison. The hope for change rests squarely on whether the American public will put to good use some of the lessons learned over the past year. Catholic social thought, with the policy recommendations it implies, may serve as a helpful tutor. But even if Americans draw their wisdom from other sources, the electorate will have to muster up an uncommon measure of political will to nudge the welfare debate back from the precipice at which we find ourselves. □

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Richard Alleva

DEAD WOMAN STUMBLES

Beresford's 'Last Dance'

Here is a sentence I wanted to write about *Last Dance*, the new Sharon Stone movie about capital punishment: "Though wiseacres call it *Dead Woman Walking*, this film has a character all its own."

But I can't write that sentence. I hopefully composed it before seeing *Last Dance* because its director, Bruce Beresford, made three of my favorite films—*Breaker Morant*, *Tender Mercies*, *Black Robe*—and I knew that if he had created an honest work about capital punishment it would be a masterpiece.

Alas, working from a dishonest and diffuse script by Ron Koslow, Beresford has directed only smoothly, even slickly, and who wants smoothness and slickness from a great director? *Last Dance* is rather well acted, moves right along, and most viewers will find it digestible. But why should a film about capital punishment be digestible? *Dead Man Walking* wasn't. Five months after viewing the Tim Robbins film, I'm still sorting out my impressions. It knotted my guts and knotted they stay whenever I recall that powerful work. *Dead Man Walking* is art. *Last Dance* is pablum.

One of the triumphs of the Robbins work is the way it balances Sister Helen Prejean's encounters with the condemned prisoner Matthew Poncelet with her experiences outside the prison as she worked for the abrogation of the death sentence while striving to comprehend the rage and grief of the murder victims' survivors. The interaction between what the nun learned of Matthew face-to-face and what she found of the devastation his evil had created opened up vistas for us: into the hearts of the victims, into the murk of the criminal mind, into the perhaps insurmountable difficulty the justice system faces in trying to punish evil.

The protagonist of *Last Dance* is Rick Hayes (Rob Morrow), a well-educated ne'er-do-well who has landed a state job arranging clemency hearings for prisoners on death row. Like Sister Helen, Rick becomes intimate with a murderer (Sharon Stone) and, like the nun, he does plenty of interviewing: officials, witnesses, survivors of the victims, an accomplice of Stone, lawyers, judges. As in *Dead Man*, the scenes between the leading players are meant to plumb the depths of rage, resentment, and repentance, while the investigation gives us a panoramic view of crime and punishment.

But the Morrow-Stone encounters are bland, beginning in predictable hostility and ending with equally predictable hand-holding and tears. Stone is good, inhabiting her role with an ease that makes you imagine the character's past. Her hysterical outburst near the end is light-years beyond her overrated, actressy pyrotechnics in *Casino*. Morrow is charming for about fifteen minutes and then you start to wonder why the director didn't cast someone whom you would want to watch for more than fifteen minutes. But even better performances couldn't have prevailed against the texturelessness, the parade-ground schematicism of the writing. "I know you're not that person [that is, a murderer] anymore," Morrow reassures Stone. But who *is* she? The prison interviews don't adduce even an interesting enigma.

And who *was* she? What was the nature of her criminality? Well, we do learn that Stone murdered the son of a rich man with political connections, thus predisposing the state to severity. But there are more fascinating details that are merely dangled before us: Stone knew one of her two victims in childhood; there was an element of class warfare in her crime; and she was even, in a sense, avenging the sexual exploitation of her mother. But all these potential revelations remain ghostly semirevelations. A fascinating background story is kept so far in the background that we squint to make it out and never really do understand it. What the movie becomes more and more about is Morrow's need to slough off his rich boy's lifestyle and refute his older and more successful brother. Finally, Stone's suffering and death seem to exist so that Morrow can prove himself a sensitive and caring guy. I found this distasteful.

But do Morrow's adventures outside the prison at least tell us something about the justice system? Certainly: that politicians value votes above individual lives, that lawyers groan under their case loads, that the parents of murdered children are often in favor of capital punishment, that accomplices to crime may shift the burden of guilt onto their partners. Gee, I didn't know any of that. Did you?

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Even worse, through crosscutting the bustle of the scenes outside prison sometimes obliterates whatever power the intimate scenes might have had. Nothing epitomizes this movie's failure so sharply as the scene in which Stone bids farewell to her younger brother just before her execution. Here was the moment when we should have been allowed to look into the heart of the woman as she laid it bare to the only person on earth she loved, a boy already slipping into the sort of criminal habits that destroyed her. What's actually on screen?

After a few exchanges, Stone begins to warn her sibling to go straight, and then...*cut* to Rob Morrow knocking on more official doors, petitioning judges, whatever. There is a cinematic restlessness here that bespeaks insensitivity. Remember the equivalent scenes in *Dead Man Walking*? Matthew Poncelet welcomes his mother and brothers; their exchanges are warm, funny, somewhat barbed, and always revealing of Matthew's background and character. Then, a lap-dissolve indicates that time has elapsed and, though this is their last chance to speak to each other, these naturally ineloquent people simply have nothing more to say. Their hearts are open and their mouths are closed. The scene was devastating in its truthfulness.

It would be nice to report that Beresford's direction transcends the script, but it seemed to me that his staging accommodated itself to the sterile slickness of the writing. He does do some very good work with actors (particularly Stone and the superb Randy Quaid with his expressively lumbering body), and the film's final quarter-hour, in which a last-minute stay-of-execution only prolongs the torture of capital punishment, is very tense and veracious. Clearly, Beresford remains in control of his craft. But couldn't the artist who gave us *Breaker Morant* have dispensed with the scene in which Stone's fellow prisoners clatter their mugs in sympathy for her as she heads for Death Row? The maker of the cliché-free *Tender Mercies* should have been the last director on earth to give us, in a prison movie, a shot of a robin sitting on the jail's barbed-wire fence. But there the shot was and, looking at it, I felt I was watching Robert Frost desperately trying to turn into Edgar Guest.

Antipunishment movies should always be worst-case scenarios. Cornball examples like *I Want to Live* tell us that capital punishment is wrong because innocent people sometimes get executed. So, shall we do away with imprisonment because the innocent sometimes serve time? *Last Dance* seems to say that executing the Sharon Stone character is wrong because she has educated herself in prison to the point where she is virtually a different person. Well, maybe she should have been executed sooner, before she had a chance to improve. It is *Dead Man Walking*'s honesty to give us a murderer who is so warped that half a lifetime in prison with psychological therapy wouldn't necessarily have straightened him out. If we find capital punishment wrong for the Matthew Poncelets, then we are truly against capital punishment. □

WHITE SMOKE

An excerpt from the new novel by the bestselling author of *Irish Gold*

Andrew M. Greeley

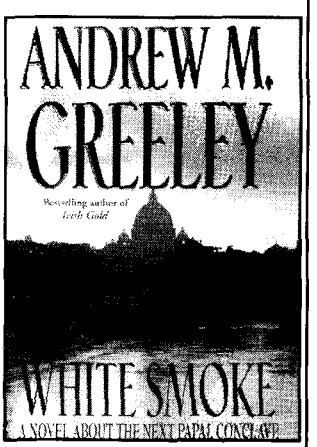
Remarks at the Collegio Nordamericano by Luis Emilio Cardinalis Menendez y Garcia, Archbishop of Valencia.

It must be admitted honestly that many of our people have a negative impression of our institution, as of course do many who know us only from outside the Church. They view us as harsh and unbending, as narrow and uninformed, as arrogant and unsympathetic. Are we prepared to say that there are no reasons to justify that view of us? Are we prepared to say that there is nothing in our manner, our style, our institutional organization, our narrowness of vision which has given them that impression?

I for one am not ready to say those things. I candidly believe that we are our own worst enemies because we have often seemed to worship not the Father in heaven but our own institutional being. We should not, my fellow Catholics, worship the Church, we should not make the Church an end in itself. The Church clearly is only a means. When the means gets in the way of the end it has become the object of idolatry. When we seem to want to impose that idolatry on others, we appear to many to be religious imperialists. Are we so sure that we never act like idolaters and religious imperialists?

I am not.

We must listen to our critics, to those who hate us, to those who will not listen to us, because God's spirit might well be telling us through them something we desperately need to hear. Can we not say even to them, come reason with us? Come, let us know each other better and let us part if not in agreement at least in mutual respect?



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Can Lonergan replace Aquinas?

Richard Liddy

Philip Gleason's new history of Catholic higher education, *Contending with Modernity: Catholic Higher Education in Twentieth Century America*, evoked many dormant memories for me: not just the shortcomings of the intellectual life of pre-Vatican II American Catholic culture, but its positive side as well.

Gleason presents a very sympathetic account of the developments that led Catholics at the end of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries to accommodate their educational institutions to the practices of the burgeoning American educational system. Even the move from the European six-year secondary school-college to the American four+four+graduate school came to symbolize Catholics taking on the American educational template. The institutionalization of "credit hours" that accompanied the increasing specialization of knowledge and departments is another example. Finally, the accreditation of Catholic teachers and of schools according to modern American standards left Catholics wondering what was "Catholic" in their educational programs. They found an answer in the fervent embrace of neoscholasticism, a philosophy that also encouraged "a philosophy of life," a culture.

Threatened by the *Resorgimento* and by the Enlightenment currents that had spawned it, Catholic philosophers in nineteenth-century Italy initiated a recovery of Saint Thomas's philosophy that culminated in Leo XIII's *Aeterni patris* in 1879. That encyclical enshrined Aquinas and "the scholastic method" as the focal point for Catholic philosophical renewal. Indeed, where else could Catholics look for a model of an "integral and integrating" education than to Thomas's *summae*? What other philosophy could link faith and life? Where else could Catholics look than to the medieval period, newly discovered by many romantic writers, and to the towering figure of Thomas Aquinas?

In fact, at that very time John Henry Newman was suggesting another approach and trying to point to modern ways of handling philosophical issues by highlighting the structures of personal experience. But although Leo XIII made Newman a cardinal, the philosophical direction pointed to by his *Grammar of Assent* was little understood or accepted by scholastics.

Book discussed in this essay

Contending with Modernity: Catholic Higher Education in Twentieth Century America
by Philip Gleason
Oxford University Press, $35, 496 pp.

Leo's mandate resulted in the founding of various institutes engaged in the scholarly recovery of Thomas, including the Institut Supérieur de Philosophie at Louvain under the future Cardinal Désiré Mercier. Although especially in Louvain, Leo's efforts resulted in a Thomism that was "more a beacon than a boundary," the Americanist and later Modernist crises resulted in much more of a mandated and "imposed" scholastic philosophy.

This neoscholastic vision of things provided the core integrating content of Catholic higher education prior to Vatican II. Gleason recalls that in the 1950s 5,000 students at Notre Dame were expected to take anywhere from eighteen to forty credits in scholastic philosophy. Even for people who were not at all philosophically inclined, this scholastic philosophy provided basic terms and relations to employ in answering fundamental questions: questions about God, creation, spirit, body and soul, immortality, natural law, virtue, etc.

Neoscholasticism brought to the fore the classic philosophies of Plato and Aristotle and the classic Christian writings of Augustine and Thomas. It was an important element in the inspiration of many to enter the Catholic church, and, I can testify for myself, it encouraged vocations. My father used to tell me, "Have a reason for the faith that is in you"—and at least at times I found some "reasons" in the works of the neoscholastics. Neoscholasticism set before the world the image of another world, though with medieval accents, where politics allowed reason full play and reason pointed to the living God.

Even a contemporary writer such as David Tracy recently paid tribute to the pre-Vatican II commitment to Catholic philosophy in higher education: "...it was the philosophy departments of Catholic universities that kept philosophy pluralistic in this country. They weren't taken over, as so many secular departments in this country were until recently, by analytical philosophy. It's been the philosophy departments of the great church-related, chiefly Catholic, institutions that kept alive philosophic

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forms that can help one think about religion and give one ways to approach theology" (*America*, October 14, 1995).

Typically, Catholic thinkers felt that modern culture was in crisis and the source of this crisis was rejection of God, the supernatural order of things, and the Catholic church. At the same time, they felt that Thomas provided the means of analyzing the prevailing malaise and offered a remedy. They were conscious of being part of a movement to make that remedy a shaping force in the restoration of a better social order: an order more human because more Christian.

Within this cultural context, Gleason points out, Thomistic philosophy was "a school" in the proper sense of the word having its own problems, its own method, and a deposit of common doctrine acknowledged by all its representatives. "It was, in fact, a very large and important school which at its height supported twenty-five specialized journals throughout the world and engaged the commitment of thinkers the quality of whose work makes it impossible to dismiss the whole phenomenon as party-line philosophizing, however much that characterization might apply to many of those who taught it to American collegians."

This was a school of philosophical "realism" with a robust belief in the power of the human mind to know. Gleason refers to G.K. Chesterton's fictional "Father Brown" spotting an impostor by observing that a person passing himself off as a priest spoke disparagingly of reason. Neoscholasticism's metaphysics was anti-Cartesian, anti-Kantian, antipositivist, antirationalist, antideterminist. It tended to subsume the central epistemological questions of modernity under metaphysics and indeed, quite often, it dismissed outright not only modern answers, but modern questions as well.

Such philosophy was also "a philosophy of life" and contributed to Catholic culture. It was part of "the feel of the things" for Catholics. One could always point to "the greats"—chiefly Augustine and Thomas—and their present-day interpreters—for many, the laymen, Jacques Maritain and Etienne Gilson. It was considered the integrating discipline behind Catholic theology and other aspects of Catholic life. Thomas Merton was not atypical of those who were aided in their journey to Catholicism after coming across a coherent articulation of the meaning of "God" in the writings of Etienne Gilson.

Gleason's book is magnificent in pointing out all the positive and indeed wonderful elements in this neoscholastic "glue" that in the minds of so many seemed to provide the intellectual and integrating dimension of Catholic life. He reminds us of all the positive elements that accrued to Catholic life in general and Catholic higher education in particular through the church's official commitment to scholastic philosophy.

Neoscholasticism was not just a creed or a code or a cult. It involved a certain "view of the whole" in the light of which the various aspects of life made sense. That synthesizing view involved a culture-molding power that attempted to see things, as much as possible, *sub specie aeternitatis*, that is, from "God's point of view." In the lives and work of some, such as Jacques and Raissa Maritain, philosophy was closely connected to the practice of contemplation. So prevalent was the Thomistic world view behind all of this that Virgil Michel, the pioneer of the liturgical renewal in the United States, considered himself a convinced Thomist.

Nor were thought and prayer unconnected to action, as movements for social justice began to appear that appealed to Thomistic principles. Eventually this "Catholic *renascence*" in America called attention to the Catholic literary revival in Europe, such as the writings of Sigrid Undset and François Mauriac. As Gerard Ellard wrote in 1934: "The Catholic Revival is placing before a world sick and weary the picture of the Mystical Body of Christ vivifying Catholic culture."

Gleason states his thesis regarding Catholic higher education in lapidary fashion: "The organizational modernization...made it possible to institu-

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tionalize the intellectual revival in the colleges, while the revival in turn reinforced the Catholic identity of the colleges at a time when they were undergoing a process of institutional modernization."

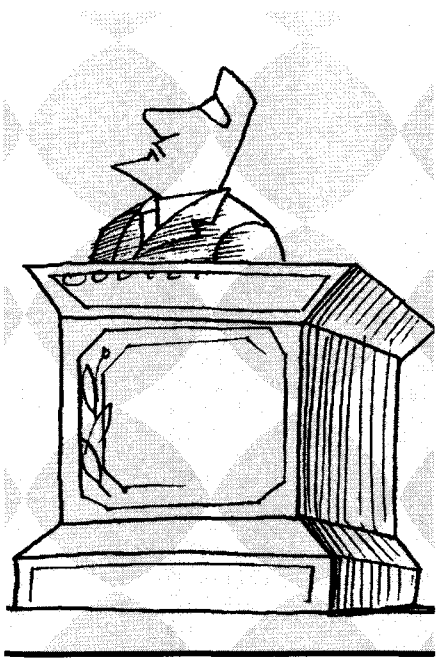
II

The Catholic revival of the 1920s and '30s was self-consciously countercultural. However, after Al Smith's run for the presidency, and again in the late 1940s, Catholics found themselves having to defend their commitment to American presuppositions; for it was precisely that commitment that was questioned by some Protestants and secularists. Did Catholics understand America? Were the two compatible? The work of John Courtney Murray, S.J., met the need for a "public language" with which to explain Catholic faith and understanding to modernity.

A call for full academic freedom in Catholic colleges and universities emerged in the 1950s and '60s, with some even questioning whether it was a mistake to think that genuine research and graduate-level work could develop under the aegis of the Catholic system. Other voices began to be heard cautioning Catholics against a "ghetto mentality" or a "siege mentality." "Integration" became the big word. How could the genuine achievements of modern scientific and scholarly culture be integrated into Christian faith? Was a "Christian humanism" possible? A more positive orientation toward American life and achievement came to be accompanied by a growing awareness of the shortcomings of Catholic intellectual life. Various dimensions of Catholic culture came to be seen as inhibiting the genuine human and intellectual development of Catholics. Gleason identifies several: a "formalism" that considered the world as already comprehended and conceptually classified in one's scholastic system; an authoritarianism that inhibited questioning; a clericalism that did not value the genuine questions and contributions of the laity; a moralism; a defensiveness.

Gradually, a battle emerged at Catholic universities between those advocating an overarching integrating vision that tended to be "imposed from on high" and, on the other hand, those eager to embrace the products of modernity: individual autonomous departments with scholarly competence in specialized disciplines.

Against the latter, the church's massive commitment to neoscholasticism could not hold its own. Neoscholasticism could not win the support of the powerful specialized departments of the universities to be their integrating language.



Gradually, the scholastic "synthesis" could not even enlist the support of the administrators of Catholic colleges and universities.

In this light, Gleason's book sounds a somber note, indeed, as it points out the monumental institutional changes Catholic higher education underwent to adapt to modernity in America—only, it seems, with the collapse of neoscholasticism after Vatican II, to lose its soul. The Catholic institutions of higher learning are still there, but any distinctive Catholic intellectual culture seems to have largely disappeared.

Is there still any possibility of infusing into the wide world of modern culture, not an imposed philosophy with an archaic vocabulary, but a genuinely "catholic" philosophy that can speak to men and women of our day? Gleason characterizes the problem of the Catholic university as follows: "The identity problem that persists is...not institutional or organizational, but ideological. That is, it consists in a lack of consensus as to the substantive contents of the ensemble of religious beliefs, moral commitments, and academic assumptions that supposedly constitute Catholic identity, and a consequent inability to specify what that identity entails for the practical functioning of Catholic colleges and universities. More briefly put, the crisis is not that Catholic educators do not want their institutions to remain Catholic, but that they are no longer sure what remaining Catholic means."

Gleason emphasizes the fact that the collapse of neoscholastic philosophy has left a vacuum in Catholic higher education. What he does not equally emphasize is that this is only part of a larger vacuum in university education as such: a vacuum of meaning. American universities today have their own pressing identity problem. In this postmodern age their operative philosophy is that there is no philosophy, no possibility of a common language with which persons from various specializations could speak to each other about what it is to be human. There is no consensus on the very meaning of "knowing" and how human knowing in one area of specialization is related to every other area and to the rest of human living. Into this vacuum rush various forms, literally, of irrational philosophies.

John Searle, the distinguished philosopher at the University of California at Berkeley, recently highlighted this situation, arguing that contemporary postmodern and deconstructionist influences undermine our attachment to the Western tradition of reason itself, the basis for all modern scholarship and science. The scholarly ideal of that tradition, which he describes as "that of the disinterested inquirer engaged in the quest for objective knowledge that will have universal validity" is precisely

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what is now under attack in the campus culture wars.

In this light, some Catholics might feel that the only remedy is to repent of our sins and to return to the neoscholasticism of old. That, I believe, would be a profound mistake. It would certainly not be true to the example of Thomas Aquinas who met the contemporary Aristotelian scientific world on its own turf. To do today what Aquinas did in his day we must engage the scientists and scholars of our own day and encourage interdisciplinary dialogue about the meaning and role of the various specializations within the whole of human knowing and human living.

Technically, the discipline that deals with this question could be called "the methodology of the disciplines," "general methodology," "the science of cognitive methods." As long as philosophy roots itself in the analysis of human knowing and human living, it deals with the central questions: (1) What are we doing when we are knowing? (2) Are we in fact knowing anything through doing that, and if so, what? And (3) How does what we are knowing in our specialization relate to everything else, that is, to all the other questions people ask?

These are questions about human interiority, about the possibilities of truth, and about the basic structure of the universe that human questioning seeks to plumb. It is essential for the health of the university today that these questions be raised in an explicit and interdisciplinary way, for these are questions that concern the very "circle" of the academic disciplines. As John Henry Newman wrote in *The Idea of a University*, unless one knows something of this "science of the sciences," then one's own specialization will only lead to knowing more and more about less and less.

Keeping these questions alive and central to higher education might very well be the providential role for Catholic higher education today. In addition, these questions implicitly contain the question of God, the ultimate meaning of meaning. This question, I believe, can be shown to underlie all our other questions. As the Jesuit and philosopher Bernard Lonergan put it, our human questioning reveals "the spark in our clod, our native orientation to the divine." It is to this question—the question of who we are at the deepest level—that the specialization of Catholic theology responds.

Neoscholasticism was not able to speak to our age because its practitioners had little or no understanding of modern scientific and scholarly ways of questioning. It was also severely hampered by an intuitionist view of knowing: reality is "out there"; all you have to do is take a good look at it. It had little appreciation for the complex structure of human experiencing, human understanding, and human judging. To my mind no Catholic has written of these methodological questions and, within them, the question of God, more clearly than Lonergan. (Happily, the University of Toronto Press is currently publishing the twenty-two volumes of the Canadian philosopher-theologian's *Collected Works*.)

In fact, I have seen the integrating power of Lonergan's philosophy in action. The last year-and-a-half I have been a fellow of the Woodstock Theological Center at Georgetown University. My experience there has been of a group of people from various specializations—law, business, politics, economics, theology, etc.—laboring together to have a common mind at the same time as we work in our own areas of expertise. Lonergan has been our inspiration. We meet regularly to analyze and relate the specific questions raised in our own specializations to our common drive for meaning, truth, goodness—and God. This process has been of enormous help to each of us in drawing out the theological implications of our academic specializations. After all, law, business, politics, science—each is an area of human activity in which God's Word would "have a say."

I could have no greater hope for our Catholic college administrators and faculties than that they would reflect upon and discover, with Lonergan's inspiration and guidance, the basic human cognitive processes which underlie all disciplinary methodologies. Such a discovery would enable interdisciplinary communication in pursuit of the common good of the university and of society. I am not saying that such a philosophy of itself will be capable of filling the present void. For any philosophy to be truly effective, it will have to be linked to efforts to attain religious and moral renewal as well. Here and there I see signs of that renewal taking place. Still, it will be incomplete if it is not accompanied by a unifying and critical philosophy adequate to our day.

There is a long road ahead. Cardinal Newman said that the church is always beginning again in each new age and, after reading Gleason's book, I am certain that we are in a new age in which we need to begin again to seek a common language with which we can speak to each other and to the world about life and God and the truths of faith. Such a language can help us build bridges to men and women who are laboring in so many specialized fields and who need a philosophical language with which to speak to each other about what it means to be people as well as people of faith. Would that we, members of the Body of Christ, could point out to them in contemporary ways the humanistic and theological dimensions of what they are doing!

The last sentence of Gleason's very fine book sets this out as precisely the contemporary issue: "The task facing Catholic academics today is to forge from the philosophical and theological resources uncovered in the past half-century a vision that will provide what neoscholasticism did for so many years—a theoretical rationale for the existence of Catholic colleges and universities as a distinctive element in American higher education." □

Richard Liddy *is the author of* Transforming Light *(Liturgical Press), and is currently a senior fellow of the Woodstock Theological Center. He is a priest of the archdiocese of Newark.*

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RELATIVISM IN RETREAT

Seedbeds of Virtue
Edited by Mary Ann Glendon and David Blankenhorn
Madison Books, $27.95, 300 pp.

Common Values
Sissela Bok
University of Missouri Press, $27.50, 134 pp.

David McCabe

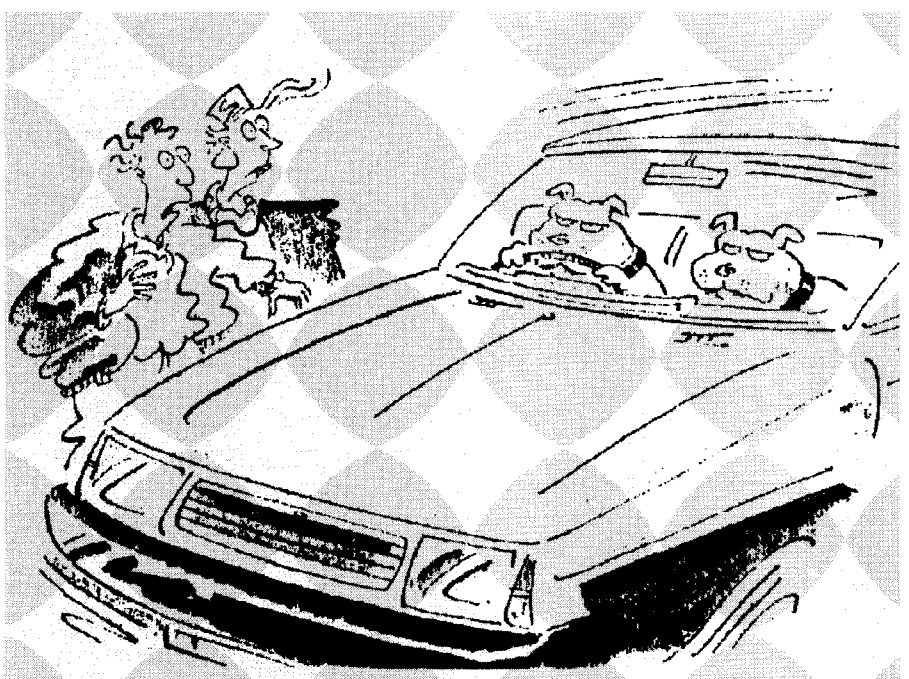
According to some, recent American history has led disastrously to a rejection of the notion that there exist either identifiable virtues that all citizens should possess or a universal set of moral values that all cultures ought to respect. Against this supposed '60s-inspired relativism, however, a counter-revolution has clearly begun, and both of the books reviewed here are to some degree motivated by a desire to restore a degree of moral ballast to our discussion about values.

Seedbeds of Virtue, the collection of essays edited by Mary Ann Glendon, professor of law at Harvard, and David Blankenhorn, president of the Institute for American Values, is yet another sign that there may be no more popular activity in this country than talking about its deficiencies. In a strange way, of course, such criticism reflects a deep affection for the nation. After all, we are often most critical of those we love most, their failings disturbing us all the more because we know what they're capable of. Readers of *Hamlet* might dub this the cruel-to-be-kind approach, though we moderns know it as tough love.

Whatever we call it, a similar tendency is displayed throughout this collection. All of the essays here (authored chiefly by political philosophers, sociologists, theologians, and law professors) take off from the premise that the level of virtue in most Americans is dismayingly low, and all offer some analysis of how to address this problem. The importance of the family as the chief seedbed of virtue figures heavily in several essays, but many examine the broader institutions of civil society. Thus one essay treats the effect that the decline of labor unions has had on citizens' developing civic virtues, another looks at the connection between religious and civic virtues, and a third questions the overall compatibility between a society that stresses individual freedom and the cultivation in citizens of a concern for the common good.

Given the skeptical *zeitgeist* that characterizes our culture, readers will no doubt find much to cavil with in these earnest and well-intentioned essays. To be sure, there is something vaguely menacing, in a 1950s-ish way, in David Popenoe's claims that fundamentalist Christian groups have been extremely successful in maintaining high moral standards among their members, or that being "socially accomplished" just means being married and having children. But skeptical critics will do better not to dwell on such occasional follies lest they ignore the merits of this collection, not the least of which is the genuine spirit of constructive criticism in which most of the essays are offered. In contrast to many critics of contemporary American culture, who seem to enjoy nothing more than a good national scolding, the authors here are chiefly concerned not with finding fault and apportioning blame, but with figuring out ways to improve our condition. (Those who prefer the scolding school should turn to Jean Bethke Elshtain's contribution, an updating of C. S. Lewis's vitriolic *Screwtape Letters* which manages to suggest that Woody Allen, Madonna, and Jean Paul Sartre are agents of Satan.)

More troubling than the occasional nostalgia wafting through these essays is their general unwillingness to connect the decline of the virtues to those social forces that have made so many Americans feel deeply alienated from the life of the polity. In this regard, questions of political and economic marginalization seem to me crucial to understanding our current



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malaise—I mean the kind of marginalization accelerated by things like the Republican party's depiction of welfare recipients as parasites, the utterly pernicious and stultifying effect that money has on the democratic process, and the schism between the rising profits of corporations and their increasingly vulnerable and dispensable employees—and one wishes this side of the story had received more attention. This omission is especially problematic in a book dedicated to renewing the virtues, for a sense of full membership in the polity must rank as one of the chief prerequisites for developing the virtues and the essays here offer too little guidance for healing our divisions. Still, the generally thoughtful level of its essays makes *Seedbeds* a valuable contribution to a crucial area of public debate.

Whereas *Seedbeds* explores the shared virtues needed for liberal society to flourish, Sissela Bok's *Common Values* is after bigger game: the defense of a universal morality. Disgusted by what she sees as the disgraceful accommodations with evil around the world that moral relativists have reached, Bok, a distinguished fellow at Harvard's Center for Population and Development Studies, claims that certain minimal moral principles are recognized by all human communities and that these principles constitute objective criteria for transcultural assessments of social practices. As the values she enumerates are extremely modest, Bok maintains as well that her approach should satisfy reasonable advocates of pluralism and diversity. In the last third of the book, Bok traces some of the implications of her argument on the conduct of international policy and crisis intervention.

Despite the many virtues of Bok's approach—including her accessible prose and manifest good sense—her book may leave readers with two nagging worries. First, Bok attempts to refute moral relativism by pointing out that all human communities recognize the moral values she enumerates. But if this is the case, one must wonder what sort of threat relativism really poses. Most defenders of universal moral values are motivated by the belief that various cultures fail to recognize such values. Since Bok believes that all cultures do recognize these values, it's not clear why her argument is worth making. Philosophy and anthropology departments may contain moral relativists, but since on her account they're mistaken anyway, why worry about them?

Perhaps Bok would respond that although all cultures do recognize certain values, they don't all live up to them, and thus her argument provides a foundation for criticizing those societies that fail in this way. But this leads to the second worry, regarding the practical force of her argument. The problem here is that the universal values Bok defends are so minimal (duties of support and loyalty, injunctions against harm and deceit, and procedural justice) that it's not clear how she could criticize a society that refused to acknowledge the richer human ideals many of us see both as essential to leading a fulfilling life and as the natural rights of human beings. Human goods like religious freedom, political self-rule, and career choice, for example, can't clearly be derived from Bok's list of minimal morality, but how far from relativism are we if we can't defend the value even of these?

Though Bok leaves these difficulties unresolved, her insistence that human beings have certain universal needs does, I think, constitute the right approach for combating moral relativism. The really difficult work, though, lies in establishing moral values substantive enough to allow for serious critique of other cultures. Though Bok more than once refers to the need for such arguments, one can't help wishing she had made them herself. This no doubt would have resulted in a book that offended more people, but also, I think, in one that might have changed more minds. □

David McCabe *teaches philosophy at Colgate University.*

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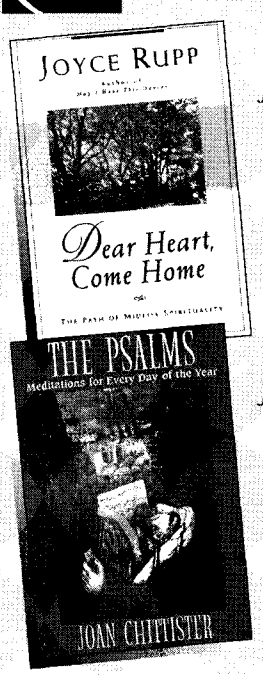

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TWO OF A CERTAIN KIND

Cyril Connolly
The Life and Times of England's Most Controversial Literary Critic
Clive Fisher
Saint Martin's, $27.95, 466 pp.

Muggeridge
The Biography
Richard Ingrams
HarperSanFrancisco, $27.50, 264 pp.

Robert Murray Davis

Those desiring to learn more about a writer usually discover that biographies reveal more about warts than works, but at least they give details about books that the reader values or may be induced to read. However, both Cyril Connolly and Malcolm Muggeridge were more famous as personalities, talkers, and journalists, though of very different orders, than as writers. Most of Connolly's books and all of Muggeridge's deserve at best to be called "historically important," a phrase to cool the ardor even of the vanishing race of literary historians. The justification for these two books must therefore lie in the portraits of the men in the context of their age.

Both Englishmen, born in 1903, they knew a number of the same people through their literary and political connections. But in most respects, they might have lived in totally different countries. Connolly, from a family that once had money and position but had grown poorer with each generation, disliked his military father and learned to manipulate his female relatives. He attended Eton, which impressed him so deeply that he once maintained that the rest of life was anticlimactic. At Eton he met George Orwell, Anthony Powell, and a number of less productive aesthetes, and then at Oxford he met, among others, Evelyn Waugh. During his education and for several years thereafter, until he discovered women, he went through the homosexual phase almost obligatory for his generation and cultivated the private myth that failure was more interesting, even more distinguished, than success. This melancholy conclusion he shaped not only into a *persona* but into material for a long career.

Nevertheless, Connolly was good at failure, or at least at not finishing things: novels, travel books, biographies, almost anything longer than a review. He showed more energy, if not more staying power, in his romantic life, marrying three times and carrying on numerous affairs, remarkable achievements for a man regarded as unattractive, even ugly, by his contemporaries. Outside of the circle which delighted in the comic complexity of his personal life, he was best known as founder and editor of *Horizon*, which carried the lamp of culture through World War II and the Attlee period, and as reviewer for the *Sunday Times*. He worked and intrigued almost to the end and died at seventy-one as he had lived, immersed in debts and logistical complications about which women could visit him and when, sustained by the forbearance and charity of his friends.

Muggeridge, the grandson of an undertaker, admired his socialist father and seemed to ignore his female connections. He went to state schools "and was thereby spared the various complexes that affected his public school contemporaries," including homosexuality. After an undistinguished and, at least in Ingrams's showing, obscure career at Cambridge, which dampened his sense of humor only temporarily, he married, taught for a while, turned to political journalism and later to editing *Punch*, became a television personality and, after a long career of dissipation (drink; women who were not as interesting or at any rate as prone to publishing, as Connolly's) helped to make Mother Teresa world-famous and became a prominent spokesman for preconciliar Catholic values. Long reconciled to his only wife but almost forgotten by the public, he died at age eighty-seven.

Except for a common interest in who was paid how much for doing what, valuable for those interested in the shifts and vicissitudes of the literary life, Fisher and Ingrams take very different approaches to their task. Ingrams, a journalist, knew Muggeridge for almost thirty years and, eight years before his death, was designated authorized biographer and given access to Muggeridge's papers and his surviving friends. He is aware of Muggeridge's shortcomings as a novelist and memoirist, but he concludes that "In his life, his restlessness, his inconsistency, his obsessions (whether with Marxism or sex) he seems at times like a symbol of twentieth-century man." As a journalist, Ingrams is more interested in what Muggeridge wrote about than how he wrote. And though he gives effective portraits of the people whom Muggeridge knew, he does little to establish the contexts in which Muggeridge thought and worked. On the whole, this is a work of journalism in a quite honorable sense as well as a personal tribute.

Clive Fisher has more lofty ambitions.

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(He cannot be blamed for the preposterous and questionably accurate American subtitle, substituted for the English "A Nostalgic Life" in the vain hope of pumping up interest in Connolly.) The language of his final paragraph is less intimate but more eloquent than Ingrams's: Connolly "has refused to surrender his hold on the imaginations of those who care for beautiful writing and the civilized delight of the senses or are interested in the literature of our mid-century" and "becomes an ever more inescapable figure in recent cultural history."

Besides using archives and interviews, Fisher has consulted the large and growing body of material about the period, including memoirs and biographies. Here he has the advantage over Ingrams, for Connolly's friends, some of them world-class gossips, seem more interesting than Muggeridge's. Fisher uses that material not just for facts but for intuitive and effective contrasts with figures like Evelyn Waugh, Peter Quennell, George Orwell, and Desmond McCarthy to reveal his subject's character and achievements.

Fisher is at least as perceptive about Connolly's strengths and limitations as a writer. He not only summarizes books and articles, he characterizes them in prose that echoes Connolly's "gift of turning a perfectly balanced and poetic sentence which was both memorable and idiosyncratic." And often, in Fisher's case, witty, as in the description of the youthful Cecil Beaton's imitation of a female singer "with unsettling persuasiveness" or, turning on Connolly's view that inside every fat man was a thin man crying to be let out, "in his case the thin man's entreaties were unheard for almost half a century."

A great many literary biographies are too long. A few, like Ingrams's, are perhaps too short. Clive Fisher's seems just right, not only in length but in the eloquence, urbanity, and wit of his prose. □

Robert Murray Davis *teaches at the University of Oklahoma. He is the author of* Mid-Lands: A Family Album *(University of Georgia Press).*

CORRESPONDENCE

(Continued from page 4)

bishops. Whenever the law sanctions private killing, even for the most understandable reasons, the sanctity of all life is threatened. The philosopher Hans Jonas outlined the danger: "It is terrible to say...but an ethics based on compassion alone is something very questionable. The consequences of the human attitude toward the act of taking life, toward making the taking of life in intolerable situations a routinely available option—to put it quite bluntly, the progressive and cumulative habituation to the idea and the practice of taking life—are incalculable. So much is at stake here that it outweighs the suffering of an individual....We mustn't let ourselves be governed by an ethics of compassion but only a sense of responsibility for the consequences arising from our attitude, from our readiness and willingness to consider making occasional use of the option of taking life. We ought not and must not let this be our starting point."

Commonweal's editorial opinion was tested by Mrs. Line's letter, but it is not changed. Experience may be definitive in shaping the views of individuals and tragic circumstances may mitigate moral culpability. But individual experience and the prestige of specialists cannot speak the final word in shaping the laws of the land or the moral values of religious traditions. We need to make use of the institutions and processes that exist to reconcile contrary experiences and to hold out to all of us the standards and limits that make possible the common life of a nation or religious community.

As Mrs. Line's experience so poignantly reminds us, abortion is the taking of human life. As such it is never merely a private or personal act.

Refreshing review

Just read Sara Maitland's review of Mary Gordon's *The Shadow Man* [May 17], and I write in admiration to say that an honest review is a damned good thing, and a bad re-

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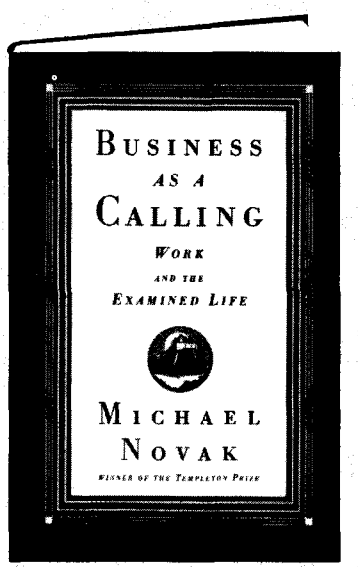
—Irving Kristol



"Capitalists with no conscience are a problem; capitalists with a bad conscience are a bigger problem. The purpose of this book is not to put a moral gloss on grubby business, but to demonstrate the moral excitement of business itself."
—**Richard John Neuhaus,**
Editor in Chief, *First Things*

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—**Richard L. Lawson,**
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National Mining Association

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view can sometimes be refreshingly good. It says a lot about the credibility of a magazine that it has the guts to be honest in calling a bad thing bad.

Congratulations.

BRIAN DOYLE
Portland, Ore.

The writer is editor of Portland Magazine.

The first woman priest

I have come belatedly on Michael Novak's article in your issue of January 25 on "Authority, Priesthood, Women." Novak's opening line—"What progressives these days are not doing is trying to offer contemporary reasons why Jesus did as he did in ordaining only males...."—led me to these reflections:

We have heard suggested that if Jesus wanted women to be priests, he would have first called his mother. But a call to serve the People of God as priests includes a call to live the life and do the work demanded by the office, and this call simply could not be answered during Jesus' time by the Blessed Virgin, or by any woman, because of the social conditions prevailing, the hostility and danger a woman would be exposed to.

It would have been unthinkable for a woman to go out into that rigorously closed Jewish world, teaching publicly a radically new interpretation of the Scriptures, or debating with the Scribes and Pharisees. Saints Stephen and Paul, learned males, paid with their lives for doing precisely that.

Further, imagine the reaction among even simple Jewish people, who had a horror of all rituals of the pagan cultures around them, but especially of those that employed priestesses (sometimes including ritual prostitution), if Jesus or one of the early church leaders were to call a woman to preside as priest at the celebration of the Sacrament of the Lord's Body and Blood. The infant church would have been stifled by public rage.

Nevertheless, a theologian recently protested: "But wait—Mary *was* a priest! She, a spouse of the Father at the very origin of the Incarnation, was ordained by him when he placed her at the foot of the cross, and she offered to him on that altar her son's life as a true and perfect sacrificial victim."

BOB MCCOWN, S.J.
Daphne, Ala.

Issues in the pulpit

In his advice to pastoral ministers on the proclamation of church teaching [February 9], Richard Gaillardetz, a long-time friend, contends that controversial subjects should not be treated in homilies; too little time, topics too sensitive.

I disagree. To be sure, there is not time for much detail, and the preacher should take care not to alienate members of the congregation. But since for many Catholics the homily offers their only access to what the church is saying in these areas, and that controversial matters are often treated superficially and/or antagonistically in the media and in public discussion, I would say that the homilist has a duty to address hard issues.

In his authoritative text *Homilectic*, David Buttrick affirms my belief and offers some how-to-do-it guidelines. For example, he exhorts "enormous diligence—in a word, homework," leading to in-depth understanding of all sides of the issue.

In preaching on Catholic teaching about the economy—certainly a sensitive issue in many parishes—I have found it constructive to invite response from the congregation after Mass, when there is more time and the faithful can air their own feelings.

CARMEN MELE, O.P.
San Jose, Costa Rica

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THE CUTTING EDGE OF MEMORY

David K. Platt

In a small bowl pinched from red Clatsop clay, I keep my grandfather's knife. I used to carry it everywhere in my pants pocket. It's a two-bladed penknife, made in Germany. At the base of each blade, two little men are joined at their shoulders and knees in the trademark.

The knife is old. My grandfather died at ninety-four and lived almost half his life in the nineteenth century. In those days, a knife might still be kept to fashion the tip of a quill pen—so, a penknife.

The blades and back spring are grey, not silver. They lie snugged between shims of brass, next to the handles, the steel so good it takes a razor edge and holds it. The handles, set with nickel-silver pins between bolsters of the same metal, are real mother-of-pearl, pale and radiant. Closed, the knife lies just short of a palm's breadth, cool and glistening as a sardine.

The knife came to me when my mother was dying. In her last months, she sought to order her belongings. I'm not sure whether the knife was something I had seen before, but when it appeared in a handkerchief box holding small treasures from my grandfather's desks and pockets—other small knives, ornate mechanical pencils, ivory rules—I knew it was something I wanted. I put it in my pocket the moment my mother gave me the chance.

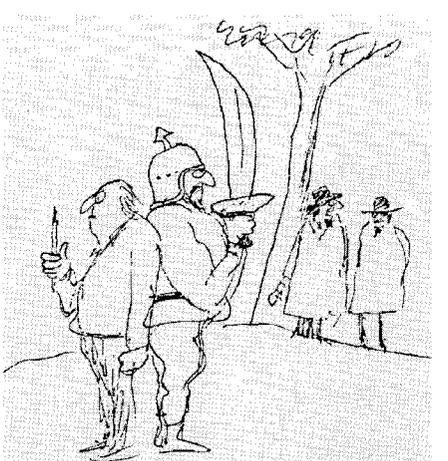
I carried it there for over a year, every day. When my mother died, it was in my pocket. When I scattered her ashes and wiped my hand on one of her father's silk handkerchiefs, it was there.

But when I returned across the Cascades to finish my term at the local college, and parked my car in the snow and cinders below the building where I would take my final exam in differential calculus, I lost the knife. I didn't realize it until that night, but my pocket companion was gone.

Some people can lose objects and be unaffected. Lost things bother me. When something as close and beautiful as my grandfather's knife is lost, I go a little crazy. I can't get it out of my head. To me, lost means "not found" rather than gone. I searched under cushions in the house, under the seat of the car, in the parking lot, the classroom, the men's room, everywhere I'd been. I made calls, didn't sleep well, crabbed at my wife and kids, stalked and paced. Days slipped into weeks, then months. I put thoughts of the knife aside and returned my attention to school. Still, I missed the knife in biology lab; it had been sharper than any scalpel.

I am not a reader of bulletin boards, except to kill time. The spring after my mother died I was back in the math building, waiting for a class in integral calculus to begin, when I drifted to a bulletin board and a blue poster announcing an upcoming play. Slanted across the upper left corner was a handwritten message in blue ink, faint against the background. "Small pocket-knife found," it said, and gave a phone number in Prineville, a town in the next county, an hour away.

When I got home, I called. Yes, it had pearl handles. No, I couldn't remember the brand, but the trademark had two little men standing together. What did the little silver shield on one side have on it? My heart stopped. "Nothing," I said, "it's blank."



"My money is on the sword!"

"Damn," said the man in Prineville, "I was hoping nobody would claim it. It's a beauty, and I've gotten used to it. I guess you'll be wanting it, though." I told him I'd be there in an hour.

He worked in the assessor's office in the county courthouse, an old building of heavy stone and dark wood. I found him in a basement office, and he handed the knife across the counter, a little reluctantly. He had sharpened it differently, but it was my grandfather's knife, returned.

For a while, I remembered his name, even turned it over in my mind the way I turned the little knife in my hand. For perhaps a year I remembered it, but now I've forgotten. I was going to send him something, a bottle of good wine, but I never did.

When he found it in the snow and cinders below the math building, what thought pulled him to the bulletin board to pen his note? It was so small, furtive; he had not truly wanted to write it, yet was compelled. By what?

I don't carry the knife with me anymore, and seldom use it. I'm afraid of losing it again. Or maybe the loss felt by the man at the courthouse when he remembers giving up the knife keeps it in the clay bowl instead of in my pocket. I can see him get up from his desk as he waits for his coffee to cool, stare absently out the basement windows to the patches of snow lying around the courthouse steps, and remember the knife. I wonder if I could find him now, years later. □

David K. Platt *is a free-lance writer living in Corvallis, Oregon. He has formerly taught composition and technical writing at Oregon State University.*

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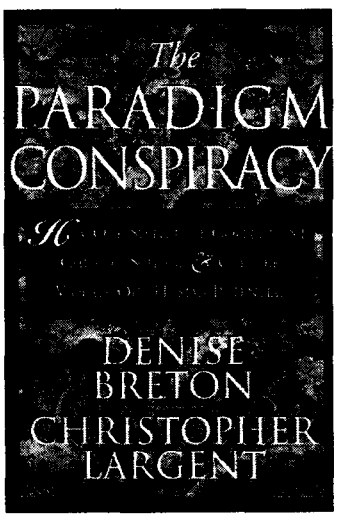
HAVE OUR SOCIAL SYSTEMS BETRAYED US?



In a society that measures worth according to dollars, deals, and productivity, we seem to live from crisis to crisis, using hard-nosed business practices, tougher law enforcement and even confinement and surveillance in our schools to keep our social systems working. What's going on? Why are our systems working so hard to punish us instead of performing their rightful functions of educating, nurturing and promoting the public good? According to this provocative new book, addictive processes permeate every social system we use from schools and churches to workplaces and government and are making us sick and unhealthy. *The Paradigm Conspiracy* explains why our systems have failed us and how they can be transformed through a dramatic paradigm shift toward fairness, integrity, and responsibility.

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